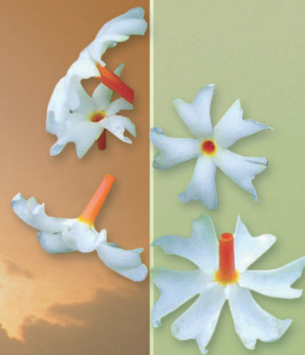


PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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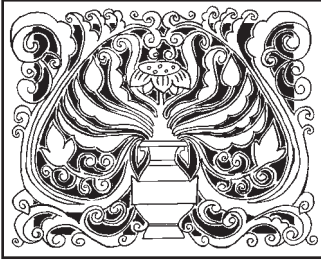


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Amrita Kalasha

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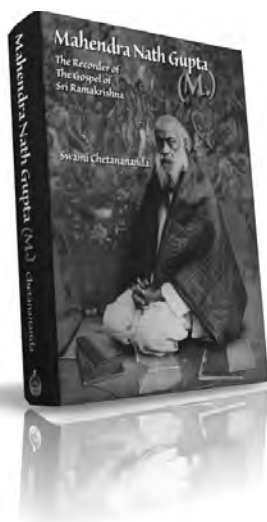


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Nature of Consciousness

October 2011
Vol. 116, No. 10

अथ यदतः परो दिवो ज्योतिर्दीप्यते विश्वतः पृष्ठेषु सर्वतः
पृष्ठेष्वनुत्तमेषूत्तमेषु लोकेष्विदं वाव तद्यदिदमस्मिन्नन्तः पुरुषे ज्योतिः ॥

Now, that Light that shines beyond this heaven, beyond the whole creation, beyond everything, in the highest worlds that are unsurpassingly good, it is certainly this which is the light within a person.

(*Chhandogya Upanishad*, 3.13.7)

बृहच्च तदिव्यमचिन्त्यरूपं सूक्ष्माच्च तत्सूक्ष्मतरं विभाति ।
दूरात्सुदूरे तदिहान्तिके च पश्यत्स्विहैव निहितं गुहायाम् ॥

It is great and self-effulgent, and its form is unthinkable. It is subtler than the subtle. It shines diversely. It is farther away than the far off, and It is near at hand in this body. Among sentient beings It is (perceived as) seated in this very body, in the cavity of the heart.

(*Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.1.7)

न तत्र सूर्यो भाति न चन्द्रतारकं नेमा विद्युतो भान्ति कुतोऽयमग्निः ।
तमेव भान्तमनुभाति सर्वं तस्य भासा सर्वमिदं विभाति ॥

There the sun does not shine, neither do the moon and the stars, nor do these flashes of lightning shine. How can this fire? He shining, all these shine; through his lustre all these are variously illumined.

(*Katha Upanishad*, 2.2.15)

ज्योतिषामपि तज्ज्योतिस्तमसः परमुच्यते ।
ज्ञानं ज्ञेयं ज्ञानगम्यं हृदि सर्वस्य विष्ठितम् ॥

That is the Light even of the lights. It is spoken of as beyond darkness. It is knowledge, the knowable, and the known. It exists specially in the hearts of all.

(*Bhagavadgita*, 13.17)

THIS MONTH

What and who is **The One and the Many** is a recurrent discussion in Indian philosophy, a discussion that is unique though not exclusive.

Swami Bhajanananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, continues his study on **Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – IV**, highlighting the synthesis and renaissance of religious

ideals that Sri Ramakrishna brought about in the world.

Love for God is innate in everyone, but it is clouded over due to our wrong perceptions and desires. Swami Durgananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda University, Belur, explains in **Bhakti** how prayer and surrender can blow away the clouds.



Joyesh Bagchi, a senior geologist at the Geological Survey of India, states that **Mother's Laughter** reverberates all over the world and that by listening carefully to it all illusions will disappear.

The views of a hedonist and of a Good Samaritan stand corrected on a third basis in **The Highest Way of Serving**, written by Hariharan Nelliah from Madurai.

Prof. Dilipkumar Mohanta, professor of philosophy at Calcutta University, notes Swami Vivekananda's contribution to **Religious Pluralism and Inter-religious Dialogue**.

In **A Study of Humankind: The Question of Consciousness** Prof. S C Malik of the India International Centre, Asia Project, New Delhi, steers clear of religious and scriptural equations to understand consciousness.

Fr Anthony Elenjmittam of the Yoga Meditation Center, Assisi, a long-time contributor to this journal, presents in **The Spiritual Mind** two modes of life: one centred on the senses and the other on consciousness, emphasising that the latter leads to God.

Concluding **Swami Vivekananda's Concern for Common Humanity**, Swami Tathagatananda, head of the Vedanta Society of New York, mentions how Sri Ramakrishna's predictions about his illustrious disciple came true.

In the concluding part of **Education for Enablement** Pravrajika Brahma-prana, a nun of the Vedanta Society of Southern California at the Sarada Convent in Hollywood, touchingly writes about the struggles of the child Helen Keller and her wonderful tutor-teacher Anne Sullivan.



The One and the Many

NATURE'S INEXHAUSTIBLE capacity for continuously producing the vast and diverse worlds is astounding. Each genus, species, and class—sentient or insentient—is different. And among the innumerable classifications there are infinite individual variations: each snowflake or grain of sand or drop of water is differently formed. Even where there are similarities a closer inspection will reveal marked variations, and this holds true for the biggest galaxies to the subatomic particles. The visible universe, however, is only one small part of Nature, for there are unseen vaster realms in which the principle of class and individual variation must also exist. Variety is not merely the 'spice of life', it is indeed life's motor, the driving force, the heart of Nature. In the internal world there is even more diversity: no two thoughts are similar in nature and content, and no two person's thoughts are similar. Accordingly, we can assume that if Nature was to produce two similar things, either due to an error or oversight, one will have to be destroyed. Nature constantly recycles material; nothing is wasted, nothing useless is produced, and there are no mistakes. The plan is in the form of an elegant evolution and involution that takes place in a mind-boggling spiral swirl going up and down. From these arguments one can conclude that there must be another factor besides Prakriti, the matrix from which the many forms arise.

Indian philosophy teaches that in every perception two things occur simultaneously: one sees the individual variation of the object as well

as the category in which it is grouped. The former is called determinate perception and the latter indeterminate perception. The particular and the general are simultaneously perceived. For instance, on seeing a cow we know also its universal *jati*, class, of cow-ness. Knowledge of one cow will bring also the knowledge of all cows in the universe. The clearer the perception, the higher the class or genus of an object one can refer to. That is why the study of one leads to the knowledge of the many.

Many times in our lives there comes the feeling of being constrained, of the world outside trying to crush us in this prison. Then the mood changes and we begin to feel so free that we could soar up in the sky. We are much larger than this prison and this world; we are deathless, fearless, and vast. These feelings of helplessness and the power to break free, selfishness and unselfishness, finitude and the feeling of infinitude, are playing in our heart. These centripetal and centrifugal forces have been acting on us, and that is why we feel individual and universal, personal and impersonal, one and many, at the same time.

Another factor posited is that of consciousness, without which one may think that the one and the many are *jada*, insentient. Many wrongly believe that consciousness also dies because it is a derivative of matter. There is, however, a great deal of scientific, non-scientific, philosophical, and religious studies proving the contrary. These studies try to understand the workings of the conscious, subconscious, preconscious, adaptive unconscious, and superconscious. But all

these divisions are merely from the human standpoint. Consciousness belongs to God and it is singular, there are not many types of consciousness, nor are there divisions in it. As Sri Ramakrishna would say, a stick floating on water does not divide the water. Nature has many forms, but consciousness is everywhere. In the powerful words of the *Aitareya Upanishad*: 'All these are impelled by Consciousness; all these have Consciousness as the giver of their reality; the universe has Consciousness as its eye and Consciousness as its end. Consciousness is Brahman.'

The *Taittiriya Upanishad* speaks of the one and the many thus: 'He [God] wished, "Let me be many, let me be born." He undertook a deliberation. Having deliberated, he created all this that exists. That (Brahman), having created (that), entered into that very thing. And having entered there, It became the formed and the formless, the defined and the undefined, the sustaining and the non-sustaining, the sentient and the insentient, the true and the untrue. Truth became all this that there is. They call that (Brahman) Truth.' How God creates is declared by Sri Ramakrishna through one of his experiences: 'One day He [God] showed me the maya of Mahamaya. A small light inside a room began to grow, and at last it enveloped the whole universe.' This experience coincides with what the *Katha Upanishad* says: 'He who—being one, the controller, and the inner Self of all—makes a single form multifarious.'

Though we run after and experience the many, in our perceptions and also deep down we have that faint knowledge of the one running through the many, for that is our nature. Yet, often times we forget this nature of ours, and for some fortunate ones it comes back in full force. Once near Vrindavan a hungry and tired Swami Turiyananda kept brooding over the fact that everyone was engaged in some form of work and was producing something, while he lived

like a vagabond. Distressed, he fell asleep under a tree. 'There he had a vision: He saw himself outside of his body, and he was looking at himself while he slept. He saw his body expanding and expanding, until there was no end to it. The body became so large that it covered the entire world. Then he addressed himself: "Oh, you are not a vagabond. You are one with the universe. You are the all-pervading Atman." So thinking, he jumped up and felt very happy. His despondency was at an end.'

There is another deeper dimension to the identity of *we* in the one and the many and this is made clear in another similar experience of Swami Shivananda at Ootacamund: 'The other day as I sat here silently watching the [Nilgiris] blue mountain ranges I experienced something. I saw a luminous figure coming out of this body, and it grew and grew, till at last it enveloped the whole world. [*Heaving a deep sigh he then remarked*]: The Master is my Paramatman, the supreme Self. It is He who pervades the whole universe. "A quarter of His is this whole universe; His other three immortal quarters are in the bright region" (Purusha Sukta).'

Sri Ramakrishna, as the Atman or Paramatman, is thus the real one and the many. And this was very forcefully brought out at Kashipur during his terminal illness. Sri Ramakrishna could not speak because of pain. One day he placed his hand on his heart and whispered to Narendran, the future Swami Vivekananda: "I see that all things—everything that exists—have come from this." He asks Narendran by a sign, "What did you understand?" Narendran: "All created objects have come from you." The Master's face beams with joy. He says to Rakhal, "Did you hear what he said?" Did *we* hear properly what Swamiji said? It is Sri Ramakrishna who is the one and the many. He says that God, 'appears manifold through maya; but in reality He alone exists.'



Sri Ramakrishna: The 'New Man' of the Age – IV

Swami Bhajanananda

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE

IN THE PRECEDING SECTIONS of this article we have discussed several functions that Sri Ramakrishna performed as the avatara of the present age. His most important function, the primary objective of his mission on earth, however, was the re-establishment of the spiritual ideal. One patent consequence of this work was the dawn of a spiritual renaissance in India.¹

The secret of the continued vitality of Indian culture for more than five thousand years lies in the fact that spirituality forms the foundation and motive power of Indian culture and, secondly, that this spirituality is periodically replenished and adapted to the changing conditions of society.

Indian Spirituality

At the outset it is necessary to understand the correct meaning of the term 'spiritual', which is nowadays being used widely in many contexts. 'Spirit' is an English word that refers to a particular dimension or aspect of the human personality. In all non-Indian philosophical and religious traditions the human personality is regarded as dichotomous, that is, as consisting of two entities: the body and the mind. It is the mind itself—or sometimes a higher part of it—that is called 'soul' and 'spirit'. Therefore, in these traditions there is not much difference between 'moral' and 'spiritual'.

In the Indian tradition the human personality is regarded as trichotomous, that is, it consists of three entities: body, mind, and Atman. A human

being's true nature is neither the body nor the mind, which are changing and perishable, but the Atman, which is beginningless, self-existent, and everlasting. The Atman is of the nature of pure consciousness, which is a part or reflection of the infinite consciousness known as Brahman or Paramatman. In this tradition there is a basic difference between morality and spirituality, although they are mutually interdependent.

Swami Vivekananda has pointed out in several of his lectures and letters that religion forms the life-centre or lifeblood of Indian culture. By 'religion' Swamiji meant spirituality. And, as shown above, Indian spirituality is based not on mythology or on certain historical events or on the life of a single prophet, but on the eternal truths and laws of the world of the spirit, the limitless realm of consciousness. This is one of the two factors that have given an indestructible vitality to Indian culture.

The second factor is the capacity of Indian spirituality to integrate challenging forces and adapt itself to changing circumstances. This integration and adaptation seem to have followed a kind of dialectical pattern. But, unlike the violent and destructive dialectics of Hegel and Marx, Indian history has followed a peaceful and cooperative dialectic.

Peaceful Dialectics of Indian Culture

At the dawn of civilization, on the banks of the Indus and the Saraswati rivers, the Indian mind

awoke at the mystic touch of the sun of knowledge and opened to the glories and mysteries of life, existence, and reality. The first response of the Indian mind to this mystic awakening took the form of hymns and rituals, which formed the early part of the Vedas. This formed the primordial *thesis* of Indian culture. Soon there developed parallel lines of thinking based on reason and intuitive enquiry, which served as the *antithesis*. Out of a *synthesis* of these two approaches to Reality there emerged the Upanishads.

Next a new spiritual stream known as Bhagavata-dharma centred on the cult of Vasudeva Krishna developed. The synthesis of the jnana of the Upanishads and the bhakti of this cult gave rise to the Bhagavadgita, a marvel of spiritual harmony and synthesis. Then arose Buddhism, which flourished as a parallel stream for a thousand years until the Mahayana logic was integrated into the Vedantic tradition by Acharya Shankara in the eighth century CE. The result of this synthesis was the Advaita Vedanta, considered by scholars to represent the highest pinnacle of philosophy attained by humanity. Several traditions of yoga—such as the Shaiva, the Patanjala, and the Hatha—which arose at different periods, were finally synthesized with Vedanta to give rise to the Shakta tradition.

When the influx of Islam took place in the eleventh and subsequent centuries, there arose in different parts of the country saints like Nanak and Kabir who attempted to integrate some of the good aspects of Islam into Indian culture—for various historical reasons this process of integration has perhaps not attained completion.

The greatest antithesis that Indian culture had to face was Western culture, which began to spread through the channels of education and missionary activity in the nineteenth century. Western culture introduced three main elements: materialistic science and reason, the idea

of an open society, and the new concept of God as the saviour of sinners, the poor, and the social outcaste. It was then that Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda appeared and harmonized these elements with Indian culture.

Their main work, however, was to re-establish the spiritual ideal, unify the different streams of spiritual life, and rejuvenate the spiritual foundations of Indian culture. This led to a general awakening of the collective mind of the Indian people, a flowering of the spiritual aspirations of the people, which has been described as a 'spiritual renaissance'. The re-establishment of the spiritual ideal had taken place in India on earlier occasions also, but the re-establishment of the spiritual ideal and the phenomenon of spiritual renaissance brought about by Sri Ramakrishna has certain unique features, some of which are mentioned below.

Unique Features of the Spiritual Renaissance

1. *Universal Significance* • We have seen that Indian culture has been able to sustain more than four thousand years of growth and development because of its inherent capacity to harmonize diverse thought currents and social forces in a peaceful way, and by re-establishing the spiritual ideal at different periods. The significance of these events remained confined to India till the time of Sri Ramakrishna. But with Sri Ramakrishna the re-establishment of the spiritual ideal began to assume global significance.

There are two reasons for this. In the first place the British occupation of India ended the country's political isolation from the rest of the world, and the work of Western orientalists and Swami Vivekananda's work of spreading Vedanta in the West ended the country's cultural isolation. As a result Indian culture has been drawn into the mainstream of world culture.

The second reason is the decline of spirituality in the West. The overwhelming influence of science and materialistic ideas, the two futile World Wars, and the enormous increase in psychological and existential problems undermined the faith of the Western people in institutional religions. This situation has been made worse by several other factors. When Swami Vivekananda went to the West in 1893, he could see that in spite of the spectacular achievements of science and technology and the high standard of living of the people, there was a spiritual vacuum in the Western world. And Swamiji understood that Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings had much relevance to the lives of Western people.

2. Emphasis on Direct Experience • Self-realization or God-realization has been regarded as the highest ideal and ultimate goal of life in India from time immemorial. By re-establishing this ideal Sri Ramakrishna gave it a tremendous boost. He strengthened this ideal in three ways.

In the first place he generated the faith that Self-realization or God-realization is possible for all people, even in the present-day world. It is not meant only for monks and recluses but also for householders, and that too without any distinctions of caste, religion, or race; and it is possible even while living in the present-day society. Only an avatara can give this assurance, and countless numbers of people have recovered their faith in God and spiritual life by reading the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. No less a person than Mahatma Gandhi has borne testimony to this fact. In his brief foreword to the standard biography of Sri Ramakrishna, Gandhiji wrote: 'His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion.'²

Secondly, Sri Ramakrishna taught that God realization is the ultimate goal of life, the very

purpose of human existence. Man's true nature is divine and, unless he realizes it, he can never attain lasting fulfilment or peace. Man's alienation from God, that is, from his own true divine nature, is the basic cause of all the existential, social, and psychological problems of human beings. This idea is in consonance with modern trends of thought.

Thirdly, Sri Ramakrishna taught that direct, transcendent experience of the supreme Self is the only ultimate proof, *pramāṇa*, of the existence of God and is the only means of understanding the true nature of Atman and Brahman.

Transcendental spiritual truths are not mere matters of belief, they can be directly and personally tested and verified. This is an important principle Sri Ramakrishna taught and Swami Vivekananda propagated. Its importance lies in the fact that it is the only principle on which religion can remain firmly grounded and overcome the onslaughts of modern science. One of the basic principles of modern science is the principle of verification, which nowadays is more often rephrased as 'error elimination' or 'non-falsifiability' principle. What Sri Ramakrishna's teaching implies is that the verification principle can be applied in the field of religion as well. The main difference is that in the field of science the verification is done on sensory data in the external world, whereas in the field of religion the verification is done on supersensory data in the inner world.

Sri Ramakrishna applied this principle not only in the field of his experiences of Hinduism, but also in the field of his experiences of other religions. In fact, it was on the bedrock of the verifiability of spiritual experiences that Sri Ramakrishna built his doctrine of harmony of religions and Swami Vivekananda built his proposal for a universal religion. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that direct transcendental experience is the only proof, test, and criterion

for the validity of the truths claimed by different religions has universal significance.

3. Separation of Spirituality from Religion • We have seen that Sri Ramakrishna's teaching on direct experience as a principle of verification has enabled Vedanta to face the challenges of science and rational thought. This principle of direct experience also enabled Sri Ramakrishna to separate spirituality from religion. By religion is meant a *way of life* based on faith in God and moral order; observance of rituals, customs, and the like; and allegiance to some institution. Spirituality is a personal quest for meaning based on a *view of the ultimate Reality* and aims at higher fulfilment through direct mystical experience of the ultimate Reality.

The outer aspects of religion, such as customs and rituals, show much diversity and are the main cause of quarrels and conflicts among religions. The spiritual aspects of the different religions present a good deal of uniformity. Sri Ramakrishna held that spirituality forms the most essential aspect of all religions. When he said that all religions lead to the same goal, what he meant was that the *spiritual paths* of all religions lead to the same ultimate goal. The separation of the essential spiritual aspects of religions from their outer forms that Sri Ramakrishna brought about has now become a widely accepted view. More and more people, especially in the West, now regard themselves as spiritual rather than as religious.

4. Harmony of Religions • Harmony of religions is a unique and well-known feature of the spiritual renaissance associated with the avatara-hood of Sri Ramakrishna. No other spiritual or religious movement in the past had given so much importance to the doctrine of harmony of religions. It is true that a general outlook of religious harmony prevailed in India right from Vedic times. But it was more of the nature of religious liberalism and tolerance than a definite

doctrine based on a metaphysical truth or verified experience. The oft-quoted Vedic dictum '*Ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti*; Truth is one, sages call it by different names' in its original context indicated an identity of divinities, and it was not so well known until Swami Vivekananda popularized it as a Vedic authority for the principle of religious harmony.

In modern times, under the term 'religious pluralism',³ the doctrine of harmony of religions is being accepted by more and more people all over the world. It is followed in most of the spiritual movements that have sprung up in recent years. In this context two points regarding Sri Ramakrishna's concept of harmony of religions deserve special mention.

In the first place Sri Ramakrishna's teaching on harmony of religions is based on direct experience. We pointed out earlier that every religion has three levels of function: the social, the intellectual, and the mystical or spiritual. Most of the statements on pluralism or harmony of religions that we come across pertain only to harmony at the first two levels, namely the social and the intellectual. Sri Ramakrishna's message of harmony of religions emphasizes harmony at the mystical or spiritual level. He was the only person who actually practised the spiritual methods of different religions, gaining thereby the direct experience that all paths lead to the realization of the same ultimate Reality, which is known by different names. Sri Ramakrishna alone attained the harmony of religions at the experiential level.

The importance of this fact is that pluralism is a way of deciding the validity of religions. World religions have different goals. To decide the validity of religions based on these goals would be 'religious relativism,' not pluralism. To decide the validity of any universal phenomenon we need a fixed standard or unit. To determine distance we use the fixed unit of metre or foot, to measure



t i m e

we use the

unit of second.

Contrary to popular view Einstein's theory of relativity does not

merely state everything is relative; what it states is that in

spite of everything being relative, the velocity of light is invariant or fixed

and, making use of this as a unit, it is possible to correlate the results in different frames

of reference. In a somewhat similar way Sri Ramakrishna used the direct experience of the ultimate Reality as an invariable criterion to judge the validity of religions. He saw that although religions are quite different from one another, they all lead to the same ultimate experience and therefore they are all valid and true. It is Sri Ramakrishna's

COEXIST

experience that

gives validity

to the theory of

pluralism or harmony

of religions. In this connection we may also note

that Sri Ramakrishna spoke

about harmony of religions not to

show his liberal attitude or with the

idea of getting name and fame. It was his

intense love for God and his experience of

God through different paths that made him proclaim the message of harmony of religions.

The second point is that Sri Ramakrishna lived what he taught. He showed through his life how harmony of religions could be put into practice in the individual as well as the collective life. His small room at Dakshineswar temple served

as a mini parliament of religions. People belonging to different religions—Brahmos, Vaishnavas, Shaktas, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs—flocked to his room. He was perfectly at home with all of them, and they too felt that he belonged to them. The way of harmony of religions that Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught continues as a living tradition in the Ramakrishna Order and in the whole Ramakrishna movement.

The way of harmony shown by Sri Ramakrishna is based on two principles. One is the principle of acceptance. It is not enough to somehow tolerate other religions as a social or political expedient, as is usually done. What is really necessary is to accept the right of every religion to exist, to accept the differences of religions as natural social processes, to accept the right of everyone to follow one's own religion, to accept the good points of other religions and assimilate them in one's own life. The second point is the awareness of the underlying unity. It is necessary to understand that beneath all the differences of religions there is the unity of the divine consciousness, and that all religions are different means of realizing that unity in diversity, which is the basic principle of harmony. This principle of harmony can be applied not only in the field of religion but also in all fields of human interaction—in family relationships, in places of work, in social life, in national life, in international relationships.

5. *A Universal Scripture* • For any religion, sect, or movement to survive for centuries the destructive forces of history the support of a scripture is necessary. A scripture is an inexhaustible source of inspiration. It is also a great unifying force. Any religious movement that does not have the support of a scripture will soon peter out.

The modern world needed a new scripture in tune with the needs and conditions of the present-day world. The spiritual renaissance

associated with Sri Ramakrishna brought into existence that new scripture. Even during his lifetime, a compilation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings had been brought out by some Brahmo leaders, who were not his disciples but admirers. Later on one or two other compilations of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings appeared in print. They were all, however, overshadowed by the magnum opus of Mahendranath Gupta, entitled *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, translated into English as the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. This is the new scripture of not only the Ramakrishna movement but also of the present-day world. It may indeed be regarded as a universal scripture. Some of its unique features, which also justify its claim to be the universal scripture for all, are mentioned below.

The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is not meant to supplant any other scripture. On the contrary, it helps the followers of different religions to strengthen their faith in their own scriptures. It enables them to see their scriptures in a broader spiritual perspective. In fact, it enables them to have a better understanding of their scriptures.

Each world scripture has its own historical, cultural, mythological, and hermeneutical presuppositions. Hence, the world scriptures appear to be mutually exclusive or incompatible. The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, however, helps us find harmony among them. It thus serves as a 'link scripture'. In this role it has an assured place among the great scriptures of the world.

An obvious feature of this new scripture of Sri Ramakrishna is its ambience of modernity. The people we meet in it are not strange or mythological people of bygone ages. They are not much different from the educated middle-class people of present times. The conversations, incidents, and occasions recorded; the various topics discussed; the description of the places; and other details given in this new scripture have

the ring of familiarity in them. What is equally remarkable is the range of topics discussed in this astonishing scripture: concepts about God and the ultimate Reality; diverse means of realizing God; practices and traditions of various religious sects; different schools of Indian philosophy; ideas of modern Western philosophers; views of atheists, deists, and theists; duties of householders and duties of monks; love for all; selfless service; harmony of religions; and innumerable other topics. The most abstruse subjects are explained in the simplest way with the help of delightful parables, anecdotes, and stories that even a child can understand.

Equally striking is the positive outlook and the mood of love and joy that pervade the whole scripture. One can hear the echoes of lively discussions, soul-stirring music, and spiritual dancing on almost every page of the book. It infuses love for God and love for the human being, faith and courage to face the problems of life, and the determination to seek the ultimate goal of human life.

Above all, this new scripture is of mature wisdom, distilled out of years of struggle and experience, and filtered through the crystal clear mind

of a fully illumined soul. What more does a book need to be regarded as a universal scripture?

(To be continued)

Notes and References

1. For a detailed account of the historical and social background of this event see Swami Nirvedananda, 'Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance' in *The Cultural Heritage of India*, 7 vols (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1956), 4.653–728.
2. Swami Nikhilananda, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2008), ix.
3. Three main interfaith attitudes are recognized: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Exclusivism holds that 'my religion alone is true, all other religions are false'. Inclusivism maintains that 'my religion alone is true no doubt, but other religions are not false because they are included in my religion'. Pluralism believes that all world religions are true since they are different views of, or paths to, the ultimate. To this list Swami Vivekananda added a fourth interfaith attitude known as 'universalism'. For a detailed discussion on this subject see Swami Bhajanananda, *Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2008).

The reader will find mentioned in this work [The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna] many visions and experiences that fall outside the ken of physical science and even psychology. With the development of modern knowledge the border line between the natural and the supernatural is ever shifting its position. Genuine mystical experiences are not as suspect now as they were half a century ago. The words of Sri Ramakrishna have already exerted a tremendous influence in the land of his birth. Savants of Europe have found in his words the ring of universal truth.

But these words were not the product of intellectual cogitation; they were rooted in direct experience. Hence, to students of religion, psychology, and

physical science, these experiences of the Master are of immense value for the understanding of religious phenomena in general. No doubt Sri Ramakrishna was a Hindu of the Hindus; yet his experiences transcended the limits of the dogmas and creeds of Hinduism. Mystics of religions other than Hinduism will find in Sri Ramakrishna's experiences a corroboration of the experiences of their own prophets and seers. And this is very important today for the resuscitation of religious values. The sceptical reader may pass by the supernatural experiences; he will yet find in the book enough material to provoke his serious thought and solve many of his spiritual problems.

—Swami Nikhilananda,
The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, vii–viii

Bhakti

Swami Durgananda

DEEP IN EVERYBODY'S HEART love is present, effortlessly sporting on its own. Love, when directed to God, is called bhakti. Bhakti is an ontological fact. It precedes everything, it is uncreated, ever-present, uncaused. The entire creation has come into being with bhakti as a substratum. Being a substratum, and hence subtle, bhakti is also power.¹ Our real nature too is power.² Thus, it follows that bhakti must be our real nature. Bhakti is spontaneous; no effort is required for our real nature to *be*. We must strive to reclaim that spontaneous state.

Reclaiming Bhakti

In our present state the forces of this hidden power of bhakti are directed towards the outer objects of the world in the form of *kama*, desire.³ However, this *kama* can never be satisfied. As the Bhagavata states: 'By satisfying desires, *kama* never gets quenched; on the contrary, it only becomes stronger, like fire fed by oil.'⁴ All our longing for *bhoga*, experience, that constant feeling of want and incompleteness, is actually the longing for Reality, which will not end until the ultimate state is reached. This longing is due to our faint unwavering memory, *dhruvasmriti*, of our own pristine perfection. We long for it since we remember it. When *kama* is recognized as bhakti wrongly directed and one starts performing sadhana, the impulses of desire are reversed and true love for God gradually emerges.

The school of Advaita Vedanta holds that in the ultimate state there would be neither the individual experiencing an object, nor the object,

nor the experience itself. On the other hand, the schools of bhakti gladly maintain that the bhakta's individuality remains in the final state of bhakti, since a complete merger of the individual in God precludes an experience between the lover and the Beloved. From the bhakta's point of view, however, there is the constant attempt to surrender his or her individuality. This surrender is a cardinal principle as a means to manifest bhakti to its fullest.

We have heard the expression: 'existential hatred'; it denotes a person's constant revulsion aimed at no particular external object. It is an intense aversion by itself; people who possess it hate everything. By inverting this expression we may coin another: 'existential love'. This would mean love by itself; a person's love without any known object. A person possessing this is a moon of love. Anyone who comes within the ambit of such a person receives unstinted, unbounded love. Bhakti may be likened to existential love.

The word 'bhakti' is derived from the root *bhaj*, to serve; bhakti means service to the Lord. It is a loving attachment to God. Narada defines bhakti as 'intense love for God'.⁵ Further, Narada states:

It is also of the nature of immortality (3).

By attaining [bhakti] a man becomes perfect, immortal, and satisfied forever (4).

After obtaining that [bhakti] a devotee does not desire anything else, does not grieve, does not hate anything, does not enjoy anything else, and does not feel encouraged to do anything else (5).

After knowing that [bhakti] the devotee becomes intoxicated with bliss, becomes silent, and takes delight in the Atman (6).

Bhakti cannot be used to fulfil any desire, being itself the check to all desire (7).

Thus bhakti is a desireless state in which all our energies get focused on God. We do not even desire anything from God. Narada maintains that bhakti is an unbroken, extremely subtle inner experience (54), the experience of Truth. Being an experience, bhakti is self-evident; no other agency or knowledge is required to know it.

What has been described hitherto is the higher stage of bhakti, called *para-bhakti*. The preceding stage is called *gauni-bhakti*, which is the preparatory or the sadhana stage.

In our ordinary state the potential power of bhakti remains dormant, like a bird trapped in a cage. The energies are then wasted away in constantly protecting one's individuality, raising a barrier around one's self, withholding the 'outgoing' and craving for the 'incoming'—all this in defence of the little self, which constantly struggles for survival. To be merged in the larger whole is a horror for the 'unripe' little self, as it thinks that it would lose its ever cherished trinket: itself. It continues to spend all its energies in maintaining and constantly redefining its separateness from the larger whole, as if declaring 'I am different; I am different (from the whole)'. The famous author Larry Eisenberg has said: 'For peace of mind, we need to resign as general manager of the universe.'⁶ This attitude of our ego shows our unwillingness to participate in God's lila, the cosmic play. This is the unwillingness to 'let go' the hold on the limited, unwillingness to expand and merge the individual self in the universal Self, in the universal flux.

It is at this point that the lives and teachings of great souls can alter our situation. They turn the flow of the already existing energy from

self-protection to Self-consciousness. Presently, self-protection is our prime concern and it takes place at the individual as well as the collective level. Just as an individual can be self-seeking, the collective—a community, a society, even a civilization—can become self-centred, closed, and stagnant. The collective can become another egoistic entity, an 'extended phenotype'—a term introduced by Richard Dawkins in 1982—of the individual. See the brutal massacres done by many communities in history only to protect their identity.

Avataras and saints not only guide the individuals who happen to live with them, but release a floodlight that dispels darkness and infuses new direction to revive a large section of humanity for centuries. This is the effect we see from the lives of Gautama Buddha, Jesus Christ, Guru Nanak, Acharya Shankara, Kabir, Tulasidas, Mirabai, Tukaram, and many others. They all, as a general rule, show us a double path: from the inside, a path of love for one's own consciousness, the inner Self; and from the outside, a path of charity in the form of serving others, which is love for the cosmic Self.

However, the objects of love, the objects of service or worship that the great souls have shown to the world have also differed at both the individual and the collective levels. This is the reason why we see differences in customs and forms of devotion in different countries and communities across the world, which have taken specific forms at particular times and places according to the spontaneous expression of particular great souls' inner experiences. In any case, all paths must ultimately lead to God.

The Practice of Bhakti

At a practical level there are two important practices for the development of bhakti, which we shall discuss now. These are prayer and surrender.

Prayer is a means to withdraw the mind from the world and gather it inwardly; then this inwardness is turned to God. Prayer allows us to establish connection with the ever-generous, ever-ready, ever-willing God. Prayer is a switch at our end that we can turn on—the switch at God’s end is always on. He is always willing to give; it is we who are closed. Silent prayer allows us to open, to listen to God; it is a rendezvous with God, though we may not always be conscious of it.

Who should we pray to? Strangely enough, it does not matter *who* we pray to. This is because prayer is a practice of indrawal, and is a change of attitude at our end towards an unknown God. It is the opening of the door to the Lord, who is already at the door. The word ‘whom’ cannot be applied to God, already at the door. But pray we must. The particular deity our spontaneous yearning takes to is the Ishta Devata, Chosen Deity. One, therefore, can pray to one’s Ishta Devata. Scriptures and saints tell us that the name of God is verily God, and thus the utterance of the name is a very powerful and fruitful form of sadhana. Hence, the importance of chanting God’s name or singing God’s glories. This too is prayer. Alternatively, we may repeat the mantra.

The second practice for developing bhakti is surrender. It is a particular inner attitude to everything that is external, the joyful acceptance that everything happens as per divine will. It is based on the faith that God’s invisible hand is far more powerful and effective in bringing about the redemption we are seeking than our own efforts. In practice it means not to regret any occurrence, whether caused by oneself or by external circumstances, but to allow events and their effects to follow their natural course. All this is to be done without anxiety, without defending, without reacting to the external odds

our ego is wont to do. The ego is like a child afraid of its own mother’s hand, or like a man afraid of his own body. The ego cannot understand that the *raison d’être* of nature is the salvation of the self, *purushasya kaivalyartham*⁷. ‘Every star shines and every leaf moves for your salvation,’ says the poet. Rivers pour tons of water into the oceans, mighty stars collapse, storms rage—all for you. Surrender is the faith that in every event is hidden the mystery of one’s own salvation. In the apparently chaotic and accidental turn of events lies the secret of our redemption, our mukti.


Prakriti, nature, toils to augment our spiritual self and is constantly effectuating an inner transformation to lead us towards God, to break us out of our limited existence into infinite expansion, provided we permit it by not asserting our little ego, by seeing God’s hand in it. We must give up the habit of inner resistance and judgement—both of which are reactions of the ego—in relation to things, events, or persons. Withholding judgement brings about the inner chemistry that frees thinking. We have been enjoined to cultivate the trust and faith a child bears towards its mother. We must abandon everything to the divine Providence.

But the divine plan is a mystery. The benefit of God’s grace comes through His releasing our consciousness from bondage. This may happen, more often than not, through misery, affliction, or mishap.⁸ If the adverse, the untoward has taken place in life, it too is God’s grace and we must accept it as such.⁹ God also uses sorrow and pain—or, for that matter, pleasure as well—for our ultimate good. At the same time, we should be careful not to go to the extent of deliberately inviting misery. Self-inflicted pain, for example to exhaust our karma, is an egotistic action and is therefore against God’s will.¹⁰ Any ego-dictated action is against God’s will.

Many people make the mistake of surrendering to God while being adamant and uncooperative with fellow humans. The mistake is in being selective. Surrender, of course, does not mean inactivity. Our personal efforts are to be used for the day-to-day needs at their practical level. In fact, not applying effort when necessary is itself an assertion of the ego and hence against God's helping hand. Thus, we must act when required, accept the situation in which we find ourselves, accept our own contribution, and finally accept the result.

Conclusion

Bhakti or love is our pristine, real nature, which we have to realize. According to Swami Vivekananda, 'Bhakti-Yoga is a real, genuine search after the Lord, a search beginning, continuing, and ending in love.'¹¹ Once the search sets in, the Divine within takes over. This is the working of divine grace.

Prayer and surrender are two methods in the path of bhakti. Prayer must be from the bottom of the heart, sincere, unaffected, uncontrived, spontaneous, with a deep feeling that God is our very own. The will of God is the reason for all our actions. A bhakta does not long for a comfortable, pleasant, and cosy state of supramundane existence; rather, the bhakta wishes to do God's will and rejoices in pleasing him always, in relishing his glories in pleasure or in pain. 

Notes and References

1. Cf. 'The finer is always the cause, the grosser the effect. So the external world is the effect, the internal the cause. In the same way external forces are simply the grosser parts, of which the internal forces are the finer'—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1–8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.132.
2. Cf. 'All progress and power are already in every

Once a boy was caught in a building that was on fire. Trapped in the inferno, he 'surrendered' to God. A man offered to carry him out on shoulder, but the boy refused. Then a ladder was raised by the fire brigade for him. However, since he had 'surrendered', the boy wouldn't move. Later, a helicopter was brought, which lowered a plastic ladder. The boy wouldn't budge an inch, adamantly sitting where he was. The boy died in the fire. He then appealed to God face-to-face:

'Why did you not help me? I had surrendered *fully*.
'But I did,' said God, 'not once, three times.'

—Anthony de Mello,
The Prayer of the Frog, 1.129

man; perfection is man's nature' (1.292); 'Let us realise [that] we are the infinite power' (1.509); 'I am the power in the universe!' (2.404); 'Soul is by its nature pure and perfect, infinite in power' (3.375).

3. Cf. 'There is bhakti within you, only a veil of lust-and-wealth covers it, and as soon as that is removed Bhakti will manifest by itself' (5.314).
4. Bhagavata, 9.19.14.
5. Narada, *Bhakti Sutra*, 2.
6. Quoted in Rahul Sharma, *Inner Self* (Delhi: Printline Books), 154.
7. Ishwara Krishna, *Samkhya Karika*, 21.
8. Cf. 'Last of all will come self-surrender. ... If misery comes, welcome; if happiness comes, welcome. Then, when we come up to this love, all crooked things shall be straight'—*Complete Works*, 6.150.
9. Maghrabi said: 'If in the pursuit of the path of Love, ye have to endure many afflictions, consider them only to be a gift and shower of Divine Grace'—quoted in Bankey Behari, *Sufis, Mystics, and Yogis of India* (Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1982), 62.
10. See Bhagavadgita, 17.6.
11. *Complete Works*, 3.31.



Mother's Laughter

Joyesh Bagchi

THE GREAT DIVINE MOTHER smiles at our foibles and is ever indulgent about our conscious or unconscious failings. She even tricks and pokes fun at us in her inscrutably mischievous ways. When we are blind with pride, passions, and thick ignorance she just laughs. We know from Sri Ramakrishna that she for sure laughs on two occasions, and as these occasions occur ad infinitum all over the world, Mother's laughter is also ceaseless. We do not know whether it is a chuckle, a chortle, or a guffaw—I think it is a giggle. But in simple and clear words Sri Ramakrishna tells:

God laughs on two occasions. He laughs when the physician says to the patient's mother, 'Don't be afraid, mother; I shall certainly cure your boy.' God laughs, saying to Himself, 'I am going to take his life, and this man says he will save it!' The physician thinks he is the master, forgetting that God is the master. God laughs again when two brothers divide their land with a string, saying to each other, 'This side is mine and that side is yours.' He laughs and says to Himself, 'The whole universe belongs to Me, but they say they own this portion or that portion.'¹

Of course God is also Mother, as Sri Ramakrishna teaches: 'A man once saw the image of the Divine Mother wearing a sacred thread. He said to the worshipper: "What? You have put the sacred thread on the Mother's neck!" The worshipper said: "Brother, I see that you have truly known the Mother. But I have not yet been able to find out whether She is male or female; that is why I have put the sacred thread on Her image"' (271).

Medical Practice and the Spiritual Pursuit

At some point in life we are all confronted with the inevitability of death. Many scriptures and saints say we should always contemplate on this final event, which makes us realize the transitoriness of this world and its pleasures, pains, and sorrows. There is a principle of indeterminacy involved in the relation between medical science and the phenomenon of disease and death. Howsoever confident we may feel with our medical knowledge, there is always an element of randomness in medicine too. Philosophers of science of different ages have tried to develop a criterion to demarcate science from non-science.

For many this problem of demarcation is one of the fundamental problems of the theory of scientific knowledge. Karl Popper, one of the influential twentieth-century philosophers of science, found it difficult, according to his own rigorous criterion of demarcation, to keep medical science on the scientific side. Popper is not the only one, nor will he be the last, to arrive at the same conclusion. In spite of the immense growth in medical knowledge, the element of 'Mother's laughter' has brought unpredictability to the whole process of healing and curing.

Mother's laughter is mysterious and somehow deep. For instance, we may choose to consider the mortality rate among Christian Scientists who do not accept artificial medical help and only wish to be healed by God. The interesting thing is that their mortality rate is not perceptibly higher.² The body is much more than a machine and more even than an organism. Vedanta says that within this body dwells the Atman and that this Atman is expressing itself through the body-mind complex. For us devotees, the Divine Mother plays within this body. This thought brings in the idea of the human body as a sacred temple.

The ills plaguing medical practice and hospitals are, perhaps, due to the pervasive objectification of the human body. Reverential love is displaced by arrogant instrumentality; hospitals have turned into huge wealth producing centres, dehumanized centres of disease; investments flow in and wealth is accrued at the expense of the ill, the helpless, and the suffering. On one side iatrogenic diseases—drug or doctor induced sickness arising due to medical intervention—are multiplying, on the other the underprivileged who cannot afford medical treatment have to live in helplessness. Sri Ramakrishna has set an ideal for medical practitioners: 'The physician is undoubtedly a noble man if he treats his patient free, out of compassion and moved by

their suffering. Then his work may be called very uplifting. But a physician becomes cruel and callous if he carries on his profession for money.'³ Humanity needs to strive towards this ideal.

The warning sounds of Mother's laughter and the ideals of Vedanta warrant a reverential and worshipful attitude towards the ill and ailing. All that is required is an attitudinal correction towards reverence, worship, and service. Nobody can deny the hugely beneficial role of medicine, so this attitudinal correction can transform hospitals into centres of service and physicians into seekers of spiritual truth. This transformation would be the acknowledgment of our limitedness and tentativeness in the medical field, in spite of the huge edifices of medical knowledge.

The philosophy and tradition started by Swami Vivekananda has many a time presented personified ideals of enlightenment through service. One such personification, who passed away some years back, was Swami Muktananda, endearingly called Ban Bihari Baba. He dressed the wounds of the patients considering them as Narayana, God, for more than sixty years in the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Varanasi. After his early morning meditation and prayers on the banks of the Ganga, he would reach the dressing room at 8 a.m., put on gloves and an apron over his ochre robe, and do the bandaging till 2 p.m. or till all the cases were attended. He would again come in the afternoon to boil, wash, and dry the linen, bandages, and so on. The simple dressing room had gained the aura of a shrine. Ban Bihari Baba was very efficient in his paramedical practice and most difficult and unyielding wounds healed at his touch—even senior surgeons brought their cases with deep and chronic wounds to him for cleaning and bandaging. Ban Bihari Baba would also reverentially dress and heal patients with multiple

putrid wounds lying uncared for in the lanes of Varanasi. In later years, when his legs had become stiff due to standing for long hours every day for more than sixty years, he would go to the dressing room on a specially designed wheelchair to do the dressings. The dressing room had turned him into a saint.⁴

Ban Bihari Baba's is the path to sainthood, and in this case Mother's laughter sounds different.

The Delusion of 'I and Mine'

Sri Ramakrishna says: "I" and "mine"—these constitute ignorance. "My house", "my wealth", "my learning", "my possessions"—the attitude that prompts one to say such things comes of ignorance.⁵ When we look at ourselves, we find that we have constructed many walls around us. These walls made of gender, language, colour, caste, state, country, religion, and so forth separate our 'I' from others. All these walls constrict and bind down our Self. We hold ourselves free, though we are driven like slaves by our senses, our property, our family, our religion, our country, our 'mine'.

Each person has a unique station in the spiritual journey towards freedom; each is a unique ray returning to the infinite centre. And as we proceed to the centre the soul's clinging to 'I and mine' is slowly transformed; first the gross aspect is renounced, then the subtle, and finally the causal. It can be also said that the journey is from instinct to reason, and then to inspiration; or from the animal to the human, and then to the Divine. As we proceed, we discover that 'all our misery comes through ignorance, and this ignorance is the idea of manifoldness, this separation between man and man, between nation and nation, between earth and moon, between moon and sun.'⁶ We come out of the individual and ascend towards the universal, for 'in the heart of things there is Unity still. ... Unity between man


and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals. ... And he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no more delusion' (ibid.). Today science is converging to this idea of oneness, as it studies and searches nature in all its variety and diversity, whether internal or external.

Reverberating Laughter

In the present society, when the most devastating conflagration of 'I and mine' is contracting the human heart, paradoxically, the greatest opportunity for the expansion of the spirit is possible. For this reason we hear today Mother's laughter all around much more than ever before. The following incident took place on December 1908, while the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi was at Jayrambati:

The Mother sat on the porch near the main entrance of her house, while the monks sat on the verandah of the parlour. In front moved the loads of paddy towards the farm-yard of uncles Varada and Kali. The fencing put by the latter outside his threshing floor had encroached a little on the road, so that the paddy bags coming to uncle Varada's barn could not pass through easily. This gave rise to an altercation between the two brothers, and a scuffle was about to ensue when the Mother, no longer able to sit indifferently, rushed to the place and, to pacify them, sometimes said to the one 'It is your fault,' and sometimes dragged the other by the hand. ... Her intervention stopped them from coming to blows. Nevertheless, she could not stop them from exchanging hot words. She, however, kept standing between them. Just then the monks came to her rescue, and the brothers walked away cursing each other. The Mother was excited, no doubt; and in a flurry she returned and sat down on the verandah of her house. And then in the twinkling of an eye her anger and agitation were nowhere; on the contrary, the eternal peace behind all clashes of worldly

interest on this stage of life's drama revealed itself before her eyes to evoke a hearty laugh; and she said, 'What a maya (magic) is this of the Mahamaya (Conjuror)! There stretches the infinite earth, and these possessions, too, will be left behind. Can't man understand this simple fact?' And she burst into a fit of laughter that lasted pretty long.⁷

The gentle way of transcending all barriers is to listen intently to Mother's laughter, and as we go forward towards its delightful sound, we find that her laughter and she are not different. It is she who wakes us up from this delusion of agentship and separateness. Let us join Mother in her laughter. 

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The Highest Way of Serving

Hariharan Nelliah

AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION took place recently between two young friends who were full of energy, hope, and dynamism. The first one declared: 'I firmly believe in the doctrine of doing good to others. As long as you are selfless, compassionate, helpful, and practise social virtues, you are fine. I have no use for the useless things of spirituality like mortification of body, renunciation of sense delights, control and concentration of the mind, worship of deities, and so on.' The other youth, who had a different view of life, said: 'Well! A human being is basically selfish and one has to live with this innate nature. To try to thwart one's natural impulses and act against their dictates is unnatural and bound to distort one's personality. It is enough to lead a natural human life with all its shortcomings while keeping, at the same time, a reverent attitude towards the Supreme. I believe in leading an uninhibited sense-bound life but with a certain degree of devotion to the Supreme. I believe in combining a zestful life of sense-indulgence with the observance of the external practices of religion like going to temples, muttering hymns, and wearing religious marks or symbols.'

The first youth represents the typical modern social worker, the archetypal Good Samaritan whose watchword is service and altruism. He typifies the philosophy that maintains that ethics is a sufficient means of noble living and can dispense with spirituality. The second represents the modern unabashed hedonist who tries to salve his pricking conscience by maintaining a show of religion and by mechanically following religion without any concern for its deep

principles. While many people conform to the pattern represented by the second youth, many others also embrace the first creed. Both views, however, are flawed. The Good Samaritan's life of service and succour is certainly laudable, but his motives are, in most cases, suspect. The epicurean's religious life is a classic instance of self-deception. He practises social virtues belonging to the genre of ethics while dumping the treasures of the Spirit as useless. With a modicum of formal piety, he subordinates both morality and spirituality to his overarching penchant for sense-pleasures and wrongly thinks that spiritual life is just a sort of pleasant diversion. It would be useful to subject these two views of life to examination and find out where they go wrong to thus arrive at the correct philosophy that would promote spiritual growth.

The First Viewpoint

Let us first deal with the purely ethical viewpoint of the social benefactor. The service performed by the typical Good Samaritan is certainly commendable. Society is undoubtedly benefited by his various selfless acts of service. But is pure selflessness alone the motive of his exemplary life or is there any other ulterior motive? The essence of karma yoga, the discipline of dedicated and selfless work, lies less in the acts performed than in the temper or attitude that gives rise to them. The impulse to do service can arise from diverse motives: the need of popular acclaim, a calculation of its usefulness as an easy access to the offices of power, the prospects of making fast money on the sly under the pretext of earnest

social service, and also, in rare cases, it can arise from the belief in the spiritual unity of beings and from an irrepressible spiritual urge to reach out to the destitute and the downtrodden to try to mitigate their sufferings—we can call this last motive the spiritual motive of service.

What is the motive that should propel a serious social worker if social service is to become a means of spiritual evolution? The operation of the ego and its impact on work is beautifully expressed by Swami Vivekananda:

We have, then, two planes in which the human mind works. First is the conscious plane, in which all work is always accompanied with the feeling of egoism. Next comes the unconscious plane, where all work is unaccompanied by the feeling of egoism. That part of mind-work which is unaccompanied with the feeling of egoism is unconscious work, and that part which is accompanied with the feeling of egoism is conscious work. In the lower animals this unconscious work is called instinct. In the higher animals, and in the highest of all animals, man, what is called conscious work prevails.

But it does not end here. There is a still higher plane upon which the mind can work. It can go beyond consciousness. Just as unconscious work is beneath consciousness, so there is another work which is above consciousness, and which also is not accompanied with the feeling of egoism. The feeling of egoism is only on the middle plane. When the mind is above or below that line, there is no feeling of 'I', and yet the mind works. When the mind goes beyond this line of self-consciousness, it is called Samadhi or superconsciousness.¹

It is evident then that if service is to free itself from the taint of egoism, it has to rise above mere 'animal' consciousness and come from the spiritual consciousness. Love for popular acclaim, which panders to the ego, is therefore a toxin that poisons the temper of social service

and makes it selfish. The same occurs with some of the motives mentioned above. The lamp of genuine social service can gloriously shine only when it is fed by the oil of the spiritual unity of beings. The genuine social servant is propelled solely by this idea and his service stems from the insight of perceiving God in all beings, including himself. For him the subtle strand of spiritual kinship that runs through all beings is a tangible experience and drives him to share the pains and pleasures of all beings.

The above reasoning clearly establishes that moral values degenerate into an empty shell when they are not enlivened by spiritual perspectives. Therefore, if morality is to be genuine, enduring, and truly beneficial it needs to be anchored in spiritual principles. The Good Samaritan who swears by ethical purism divorced from spirituality is bound to degenerate into what the Bhagavadgita calls *mithya-acharab*, a hypocrite.² The social worker who fancies that moral values can safely stand as independent and self-sufficient means and can dispense with the prop of spiritual ethos is living in a fool's paradise. Thus, a keen sense of spiritual awareness is the bedrock upon which genuine social service and altruism can be built.

Nothing highlights the organic nexus between morality and spirituality as vividly as certain verses in the twelfth chapter of the Gita:

He who is not hateful towards any creature, who is friendly and compassionate, who has no idea of 'mine' and of egoism, who is the same under sorrow and happiness, who is forgiving; he who is ever content, who is a yogi, who has self-control, who has firm conviction, who has dedicated his mind and intellect to me—he who is such a devotee of mine is dear to me. He, too, owing to whom the world is not disturbed, and who is not disturbed by the world, who is free from joy, impatience, fear and anxiety, is

dear to me. He who has no desire, who is pure, who is dextrous, who is impartial, who is free from fear, who has renounced every undertaking—he who is (such) a devotee of mine is dear to me (13–16).

The Bhagavata also presents two interesting instances wherein we can find confirmation of the nexus between morality and spirituality. The first one is about Vedic ritual-bound brahmanas and the other about Ranti Deva. In the first story some brahmanas who were pure, honest, and dedicated to scriptural study punctiliously performed rituals, yet they were woefully lacking in spiritual insight. As a result they did not help the cowherd boys distraught with hunger and thirst. They even failed to recognize the Lord.³ In the second moving story King Ranti Deva, who together with his family was starving due to a famine, obtained some food to assuage their gnawing hunger. As he was about to share the food with his family members, a brahmana guest arrived and begged him for food to appease his hunger. The king gladly gave him a good portion of the food, seeing the Lord in him. As he was about to divide the remaining food among his family members, a labourer appeared on the scene and appealed to the king for food. Seeing again the Lord in him Ranti Deva gave him some food. When he was about to apportion the remaining little food among his family, a hunter with a pack of dogs presented himself before him and prayed for food for the dogs and for himself. Ranti Deva's spiritual insight was so profound that he saw the hunter and the dogs as manifestations of the Lord. He prostrated before them and gladly offered them the remaining food. Ranti Deva had now only some water to slake the thirst. Presently, an outcaste turned up and begged him for water to quench his thirst. Ranti Deva was moved to great pity on hearing the heart-rending appeal of the outcaste and uttered these sublime words: 'I do not pray to the Lord for the state

in which I shall be endowed with the eightfold powers, nor even for the state of liberation from the cycle of birth and death. I desire only to abide within all beings and undergo the sufferings that accrue to them. By my taking over their sufferings, they will be free from misery.'⁴ Ranti Deva was so remarkably self-sacrificing that his love and concern for distressed beings overcame the natural love of his own life and the urge to save it at all cost. Hardly had he offered the scanty amount of water to the outcaste and his dogs when the brahmana, the labourer, the hunter, and the outcaste vanished and in their places appeared Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara.

In the first story the brahmanas engrossed in rituals and swollen with self-conceit blithely continued with their sacrifices without any concern for the cowherd boys' pangs of hunger and thirst. In consequence the Lord eluded them. But in the second story Ranti Deva, in whom the ego was utterly absent, obtained divine grace. As a corollary we can state that egoism is immoral and non-egoism is moral. In the luminous words of Sri Ramakrishna: 'This maya, that is to say, the ego, is like a cloud. The sun cannot be seen on account of a thin patch of cloud; when that disappears one sees the sun.'⁵

The pithy spiritual clue that Sri Ramakrishna whispers in a state of samadhi, '*Shiva jnane jiva seva*; serve the jiva with the knowledge it is Shiva', is promptly appropriated by Swami Vivekananda, who works out its implications and translates them into practice. The lofty message encapsulated in that aphoristic assertion is forcefully pressed into service to make Vedanta practical and dynamic. This message of the Master is raising an army of social servants with uncommon vigour, steadiness, and genuineness to their ideal. For it is only on the fertile soil of spiritual consciousness that the sapling of moral temper can have a vigorous growth.


The Second Viewpoint

The epicurean's creed of compatibility between sense-enjoyment and religion is riddled with a host of flaws. The epicurean believes that unfettered enjoyment of the senses is not detrimental to spiritual pursuits, while maintaining that certain routine practices like going to temples, worshipping deities there, or wearing religious symbols would suffice for spiritual redemption. In other words, he gives primacy to the enjoyment of worldly pleasures and subordinates morality and spirituality to the demands of hedonism. His epicurean philosophy—upheld and acquiesced by a lot of people—is misleading. It exalts the body and belittles the Spirit. It disparages the Spirit by ignoring it and by clinging to the dry shell of mechanical rituals. It demeans spiritual experience and, by substituting in its place superficial spiritual practices and rituals, promotes hypocrisy and self-deception.

Vedanta does not lay stress on the external insignia of religion, but offers a fourfold spiritual strategy to gravitate towards the Divine, the sterling moral qualities of *viveka*, discernment, *vairagya*, dispassion, *shat-sampatti*, six treasures—*shama*, control of the mind, *dama*, restraint of the senses, *uparati*, withdrawal of the mind, *titiksha*, forbearance, *shraddha*, faith, and *samadhana*, constant concentration—and the rare spiritual virtue of *mumukshutva*, intense yearning for liberation. While *viveka*, *vairagya*, and *shat-sampatti* may be considered as predominantly ethical virtues, *mumukshutva* is a spiritual trait. It is this longing for liberation that helps the former three to be practised. This fourfold discipline represents a happy fusion of morality and spirituality. It is a potent weapon to destroy egoism and ignorance.

The earnest social worker would do well to cultivate, as far as possible, certain spiritual awareness, lest his moral virtues should

degenerate into mere pretence or self-aggrandizement. The epicurean religionist needs to give up his skewed value-system that enthrones sense-indulgence and consigns ethics and spirituality to a secondary place.

Rivers, trees, and clouds serve as splendid examples for selflessness, service-mindedness, and generosity. Rivers carry heavy loads of water to promote the good of others. Trees bear luscious fruits for the pleasure of others. Clouds pour copious rains, thereby causing rich harvest of cereals and vegetables. Rivers, trees, and clouds are unselfish, no doubt, but they are constitutionally incapable of consuming their produce; therefore, there is nothing to be excited about their apparently selfless nature. But if a human being, in whom selfishness and egoism are deeply entrenched, exhibits the rare virtues of altruism and service-mindedness out of spiritual motives, such a one deserves praise. Through unselfish service a human being can outgrow its selfish 'animal' habits and impulses and evolve into a divine being. Thus, morality bereft of spirituality is hypocrisy, and spirituality without morality is heresy. Morality and spirituality are neither an ill-assorted pair nor fair-weather friends knit together by circumstances of expediency. Like Siamese twins, organically united, they help a person's consciousness rise from the human to the Divine. 

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Religious Pluralism and Inter-religious Dialogue

Prof. Dilipkumar Mohanta

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN calls Swami Vivekananda a 'spokesman of the Divine Logos'.¹ And Swamiji, true to his nature and also to the spirit of India's pluralistic cultural history, says that different religions 'are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind; and not one can become dead, not one can be killed.'² Moreover, this truth was demonstrated by his guru Sri Ramakrishna, who said: '*Yatho mat, tatho path*; as many opinions, so many paths.' Elaborating on this saying Sri Ramakrishna said: 'If you believe that God is formless, then stick to that belief with firm conviction. But don't be dogmatic; never say emphatically about God that He can be only this and not that. You may say: "I believe that God is formless. But He can be many things more. He alone knows what else He can be. I do not know; I do not understand."³

Given the diversity of human nature and temperament, the uniqueness of each religious tradition is essential for its existence. When Swamiji speaks of *unity* in the context of religions, he does not speak of *uniformity*. This unity lies at the core of all religions. His thorough reading of India's cultural history enables him to decipher the cultural semiotics that reveals the open, free, and potentially creative pluralistic Indian mind. Defending the pluralistic approach Swamiji says: 'There may be almost contradictory points of view of the same thing, but they will all indicate the same

thing.'⁴ This may be considered as an important clue to understand religious pluralism and to initiate inter-religious dialogue; but each religious tradition, according to Swamiji, contains within itself a special evolutionary pattern. This implies that religious traditions, as different ways of life, are shaped by sociocultural contexts; and as sociocultural contexts are in flux, religious traditions also undergo change. If any religion resists change, it creates rigidity and advocates exclusivism. Swamiji remarks that religions 'become dangerous only when they become rigid, and will not move further' (2,500). Unless a minimal condition of openness and receptivity is fulfilled no inter-religious dialogue can be initiated, for such a dialogue must allow us to question and disagree with sincerity and respect. It surely does not stop with the practice of tolerance of other faiths, but it has to accept other religions as true. The pluralistic hypothesis about religion relativizes one's own religion by situating it within the broader context of religious plurality. It indicates a direct experience of 'otherness', which is difficult to ignore in today's world. This feeling or, to use a Paul Tillich's phraseology, 'ultimate concern' is the essential feature of any true religion for the age, which has to teach the sacrifice of one's personal interests for a common good and the sensibility to feel on a par with others. It is sad that in many institutionalized religions very few people have the attitude of accepting others' faiths as true as their own.

Plurality Is a Fact of Existence

Emperor Akbar in the year 1581 CE tried to construct the structure of a universal religion. At his court he assembled not only Hindus and Muslims, but also Jews, Zoroastrians, Jains, Buddhists, and Christians. In 1575 he had opened the *Ibadat-khana*, the house of religious assembly, in his court at Fatehpur Sikri. By assembling the basic ideas from different religious traditions he tried to formulate a new religion known as *Din-i-ilahi*, divine faith. But this new religion, which was more of an ethical system, never became popular outside his court, rather it made him unpopular with orthodox Muslims. Swamiji's approach is totally and qualitatively different from that of Akbar.

For Swamiji a single organized religion cannot satisfy all human religious aspirations due to the diversity of people's needs, interests, and capabilities. Different religions are like different lamps that shed the same light. Swamiji says that 'holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and ... every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character' (1.24). Though Swamiji was an Advaitin, non-dualist, he did not advocate the view that the truth of Advaita is available only in Hinduism, for he believed that all religious traditions, by a process of natural spiritual evolution, would grow towards Advaita just as each individual is growing and developing according to his or her own nature. Further, he warned that by talking ill of other religions we harm our own religion. This openness and freedom can make world religions more dynamic. Besides, religions also have to stop being used as a political lever. Plurality is the fact of existence and gives scope for tremendous innovation. Vedanta recognized this fact, which has been the basis of Indian life.

Therefore, Swamiji's approach to religious

pluralism may be better understood if we read it through the impersonal nature of Reality as presented in Advaita Vedanta, a Reality devoid of all kinds of differences. As soon as this Reality is perceived, all apparent differences cease. Acharya Shankara teaches: 'Brahman, verily, is known to be of two forms: that which is qualified by the adjunct or difference caused by the modifications of name and form, and that which, on the contrary, is devoid of all adjuncts.'⁵ The implication of this teaching of Advaita Vedanta, as understood by Swamiji, admits that though Truth is one, *paramarthika*—one Reality for all religions at the level of realization or religious experience—on the relative, *vyavaharika*, interpretational level we see Reality clothed in many ways and addressed by many names. This is also called *tatastha lakshana*, secondary characteristics, in which God is thought of as the creator, sustainer, and destroyer of the world. The *svarupa lakshana*, primary characteristic, of God is that it does away with all names and forms and speaks of Reality as absolute.

When a Hindu speaks of Brahman or a Muslim speaks of Allah, they are not referring to different parts of Reality but to different ways in which the limitless Reality has been thought of and experienced by different human beings, who have various intellectual frameworks and devotional activities. The interpretation of religious experiences is invariably done through a historically and culturally determined paradigm. This paradigm differs from culture to culture in accordance with the prevalent concepts, symbols, doctrines, modes of thinking, as well as geographical, climatic, and economic circumstances; consequently the one Reality is worshipped in different forms: '*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*'; Truth is one, sages speak of it variously.'⁶



Reality as the Basis of Plurality

A genuine sense of pluralism cannot be understood unless it is grounded on true spirituality, which is distinguished from mere institutionalized piety. It is based on universal love, and if one has genuine love for someone, say a child's love for the mother, one cannot hurt the mother; if this be extended to others, then only true spirituality and plurality can be realized. From the standpoint of Swamiji's approach there is neither justification for religious conflict nor for reducing all other religions to one's own, much less for excluding other religions as not genuine.


Pluralism states that in all forms of religion people are approaching the same ultimate Reality. Swamiji's approach to plurality of religions may be taken as a ground for both a commitment to Truth and a possibility for different interpretations about the same Truth in order to suit the various sociocultural and historical contexts. He says: 'It is urged that even in physical body and

social classification, absolute sameness would produce natural death and social death. Absolute sameness of thought and feeling would produce mental decay and degeneration.'⁷ He also argues in favour of modifying the ritualistic aspects of religion in accordance with the necessity of the changing times. He is against any kind of superstition; when he speaks of religion, he advocates elimination of certain religious practices that are not based on reason.

From this it appears that for Swamiji religious disagreements are due to narrow, selfish, dogmatic, fanatical motives. He thus discards and strongly condemns sectarianism and bigotry. By universal religion he understands an outlook of religious diversity. According to him, it is neither necessary nor possible to impose one's viewpoint upon other. His attempt is not to preach a universal religion by putting together the essential elements of all the different religions, he rather emphasizes that Truth is not confined to

any particular faith, doctrine, or philosophy and that Truth is a matter of 'experience'. The survey of other religious traditions would improve the understanding of one's own religion.

Vivekananda's philosophy provides, in the context of religion, an opportunity for the study of other religions not merely from the outside but, particularly, from the inside. It tells us to internalize our religious position by considering the context of other positions as our own, and it also asks us to transform our self-centred approach to a God-centred one. In today's religiously pluralistic societies each religious tradition should make efforts to absorb the spirit of the other, at the same time preserve its own uniqueness and individuality. Swamiji says: 'The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth' (1.24). Since all religions are paths to God, they are equally valid; there is no question of superiority or inferiority among them. As the Bhagavadgita says: 'According to the manner in which they approach Me, I favour them in that very manner. O son of Pritha, human beings follow My path in every way.'⁸ This is an admission that faiths different from ours are also bearers of divine light. The Gita further says: 'O scion of the Bharata dynasty, whenever there is a decline of virtue and increase of vice, then do I manifest Myself' (4.7). This is the standpoint of the Vedic religion, which was authenticated by Sri Ramakrishna—who himself practised different religious traditions and arrived at the same Truth—and Swami Vivekananda; this is a liberal, non-aggressive, non-proselytizing view that gives rise to acceptance and respect for other faiths and opens the doors to inter-religious dialogue.

To conclude we can present an answer to a classical question: Why is there so much conflict in the name of religion? Because of the emphasis laid on external practices as the central feature of religion. When the spiritual aspect of each religion is emphasized there is no more room for conflict; only humility, sympathy, and understanding others' needs and difficulties spring as a result. It is not important whether we are Christians or Hindus or Muslims, what matters is whether we are good or bad. Pluralism inspires people of one religion to consider others not as rivals but as friends, watering and nurturing the spiritual roots of humankind. Swamiji protested against the evils of casteism and meaningless superstition and inspired everyone towards the ideal of '*Atmano mokshartham jagadhitaya cha*'; for one's own liberation and for the good of the world'. Swamiji saw that the cause of many of our religious and social problems is the want of application of the grand principles and sublime philosophy of Vedanta. But these being impersonal to many, he held aloft the shining example of his guru's life and message, which can make pluralism and inter-religious dialogue a reality. 

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A Study of Humankind: The Question of Consciousness

Prof. S C Malik

DUALISTIC AND anthropocentric world views dominate the modern world. These world views can be summarized thus: (i) The universe is a machine, not an organism having consciousness; (ii) this universe is real to the extent that it can be externalized and quantified; (iii) the subjective internal nature of an individual is different from the external, which alone can be objectified; (iv) intelligence follows matter and the former must be explained in terms of the latter; (v) time and space are essentially uniform and are externally real and independent; (vi) human beings are considered to be essentially rational animals without any transpersonal spirit, without any basic hierarchy of consciousness among them—and if at all there is, it is irrelevant to the understanding and organization of society—and though imperfect beings, humans are the measure of all things.

Regarding human knowledge, these world views have the following characteristics: (i) There is a single truth, held by religion in the past and by scientific knowledge at present; (ii) the study of the subjective and the objective can be completely separated, without any need for first studying the subjective; (iii) knowledge is an end in itself, and can also be applied for the betterment of humans and society; (iv) the only way by which knowledge can be obtained is reason and the measurements of scientific instruments; (v) true knowledge is obtained by proceeding from the particular to the general; (vi) it is necessary to detach oneself from the

object of study; (vii) reality is a mental construct, not a vision or experience of particulars; (viii) true knowledge is fundamentally quantitative, not qualitative; (ix) the truth and falsity of propositions is self-evident, irrespective of the person who states them; (x) the conclusions of faith and religion are not valid means for the acquisition of true knowledge.

The above concepts have produced serious consequences, both theoretical and pragmatic, and have impacted humanity in various ways. The most damaging is the development of a survival mentality that has accentuated techno-economic overgrowth, which has led to wars, tyranny, and pollution. In its rigidity, it has ignored mystical knowledge as well as human aesthetic values and has taken many persons away from the true foundations of religion, which are morality and unselfishness. Civilization and human life is becoming increasingly fragile and prone to fragmentation; the division between the sacred and the secular is becoming more pronounced, resulting in a psychological tendency towards angst, distrust, vulgarization, commercialization, and victimization.

It is evident that we need to re-evaluate the very premises of life to thus find insights on how to act effectively and appropriately in the critical times our civilization faces today. Unfortunately, most policy-makers do not think there is a practicable solution, and as a result we are unable to bring about the required authentic qualitative, not mere quantitative, transformation. What is

essentially missing is the inquiry into the nature of consciousness.

What is Consciousness?

One can begin by asking, why is one aware of anything at all? Would it not be simple, as has been done for the last two hundred years, to transform human life and society without bringing in consciousness? Several social scientists and others dealing with the human phenomenon have seldom considered it necessary to take consciousness into account. Others say that consciousness is to be dealt with by religious or philosophical disciplines, as it belongs to the mystic discourse. And some others consider it as an epiphenomenon with increasing evolutionary complexity. The view that consciousness is primordial and manifests itself in different forms is rarely entertained. Because consciousness cannot be verified by empirical tools the attitude towards it is dismissive and has overlooked the fact that science itself is based on certain *a priori* assumptions.

Today neuroscience is studying consciousness in the brain, but anthropologists ignore it in their studies on human societies. The brain gave humans a great evolutionary survival advantage over other animals, as far as they became socio-cultural beings. Humans can produce symbols in order to record data and then react to the environment according to their stored data. In time these conditioned responses became very sophisticated, linguistically structured, and discursive in nature, creating in the modern human an awareness of 'I'. This 'self-consciousness' is generated within the sociocultural system in which each individual is born, and it makes people feel as separate entities; this awareness of 'I' is not what we mean by consciousness.

Science, however, is recognizing that the nature of subjectivity and objectivity is relative and that they affect each other. It tells us of the ever

dynamic order-disorder-order states, of change, of unpredictability and uncertainty. One may also realize the same through the study of the self, present in ancient religious texts of all cultures. Buddhists talk of the no-self, which is not permanent. But the illusion of permanence, of this linear psychological thought-form, of the 'I', is so strong that its falseness is disbelieved, despite the constant direct experience of names and forms disappearing all around. In this illusion of psychological linear time our hopes, regrets, resentments, expectations, and so on, arising from past experiences, are constantly projected onto a future promised heaven, here or beyond. Thus, our thoughts move mechanically as a pendulum between past and future projections. In this respect the individual and collective notion of development and progress, quantified in terms of development indices, creates the mirage of ever-receding utopias.

The Opposite Approach

In terms of what has been stated above, it becomes imperative for the social sciences to understand the nature of consciousness, especially because there is little knowledge about it. To know this universe it is necessary to first understand the nature of the knower. Unfortunately, we, individually and collectively, are dominated by the notion that we are a body, a mind, and memories, and that consciousness is an epiphenomenon of them. Could it not be stated the other way round, that it is consciousness which has bodies, brains, and so on? If so, this would be a complete reversal of perception and would enable us to understand that what we normally call real is, in fact, abstract and what we call abstract is real. This perspective would produce a different way of life.

If one states that consciousness is the baseline within which everything functions, then the evolutionary and other models for the study of

humans would need to be revised. Often social scientists question this, since they believe their study is only of manifested behaviour. But as has been stated in many ancient texts, consciousness is both internal and external, transcendent and immanent. Has it ever been considered by science that consciousness can be an energy that manifests as form, which includes words, thoughts, and other conceptual and symbolic ways? Consciousness is not a thing, so how can anyone possibly examine it with the tools of empirical science? It should require another methodology. The mind has the capacity to examine itself by looking at its creations as reflections of consciousness. It is like studying subatomic energy, which is examined only by the way it manifests and not in a particular context at all times.

We also need to consider that as consciousness is primordial, it has always existed—there is no primitive or advanced consciousness. Within this framework all beings are equal, though apparently different. It is this view alone that may transform the way we see the world around us. This clearing up of all false identifications, of the illusion of narrow visions, takes place effortlessly, on being awake. But who is awake? We are told that it is that personal-impersonal Being, infinite, eternal, to whom no thought or word can describe.

Therefore, consciousness cannot be grasped intellectually, although as manifested form it identifies and locates itself within the biosocial memory patterns symbolically encoded. While it is beyond words, sometimes it is intimately expressed in poetry, music, and other aesthetic creations, in some works of science, and of course in authentic mystic experiences. These moments of communion with that Being occur when the limited ego disappears and they bring about immense peace and tranquillity, that ineffable experience in which there is neither the experiencer nor the experienced, because both

are one. This happens when there is stillness of the mind. Such impersonal revelations of consciousness are truly objective, speaking in academic terms, while the objectivity, in normal scientific discourse, is relative. The moments in which the individual perceives consciousness are authentic moments, while the pseudo-scientific ones are not. The former are not quantifiable, yet available at any time. Thus, authentic communication at this level of awareness, which is impersonal, allows for true understanding with regard to situations, events, and persons.

A Play of Consciousness

Most explanations of the external world are mechanistic interpretations of the processes of life. Examining the mind in this manner is like looking for an operator in a television set or in the integrated circuits of a computer. But the mind does not exist apart from consciousness. Those who try to prove that the mind begins and ends in the brain can prove it only in an intellectual way; that is, through their minds. Is this 'knowing' to be located in the individual's brain or in the mind? Is the knower a by-product of biochemical workings? Surely the knower cannot be a transient derivative arising out of atoms and molecules of lesser known matter, because if it were so we would not be able to enquire about creation or existence, about what is real and what unreal. Could it not be then that matter is nothing but the universal mind, a manifestation of consciousness? It is itself the known, the knower, and the knowing.

Thus, understanding consciousness is crucial in all aspects of life. This has been expressed in many lives down the ages and it is the grand expression of all civilizations. Once again, consciousness cannot be accessed by a limited rational-empirical, positivistic, and reductionist philosophy, and much less by gross tools of measurement.

(Continued on page 646)



The Spiritual Mind

Fr Anthony Elenjmittam

THERE ARE TWO WAYS OF LIVING in the world: through a life centred on the senses or through a life centred on consciousness, on self-awareness. While living at the sensory level the mind becomes yoked to the senses and invariably bubbles out to experience the world. This experience of the world is always considered to be real. On the other hand, the life of self-awareness is deep, holy, creative, and full of energy. It is more real than the external world of the senses. When the mind is yoked to consciousness, to the divine spark within and not to the body or the senses or the 'I', it becomes the spiritual mind. It is this mind that leads us to the enlightenment that Buddha, Christ, Pythagoras, Lao-tzu, and other prophets, sages, saints, and philosophers attained and bequeathed to humanity as the goal. This goal is variously called self-realization, supreme fulfilment, the attainment of God, and the like.

When the mind is stuck in the five senses, it suffers agony and misery. All the problems of the world are mainly due to this condition of the mind. Ideally, the senses should serve us only to gather data, which can be utilized for creating a spiritual mind. But unfortunately the vast mass

of humans follows the urges of the senses and the instincts. The awareness of this situation should serve us to monitor our behaviour and as an incentive to wake up from such a life. Only then can human beings bring peace into the world and attain fulfilment and nirvana.

Means and Goal of the Spiritual Mind

The search for the means to build a spiritual mind comes to many sincere people who desire something higher than sense life. And among all the means introspective meditation is the easiest and the best. Following this path one can clearly see and learn the difference between the life of the senses and the life of self-awareness and higher intelligence. It is the quality of the mind that makes and unmakes life. The mind can be heaven or can be hell. In the words of Buddha: 'As humans think so do they become, as they will think so will they become.' So, since each one of us is the architect of one's own destiny, we have to be constantly alert to think only right thoughts and eschew the counterproductive ones.


The specific feature of human beings is rationality. Without the use of it we are just any

other mammal. The sensory life is common to humans and animals, but the rational and intellectual life is the specific feature of human beings. Through our intellectual life we can acquire scientific knowledge and apply this knowledge for the benefit of humankind. But instead we have become slaves of scientific knowledge and technology. If this knowledge is used for noble purposes, it can help our intellect to follow a highly ethical and spiritual life.

Keeping our mind and heart ever in the world of consciousness implies self-abidance, which is also the ground of the individual soul and of the Self. To abide in oneself is to know one's real nature. As Jesus Christ said: 'I and my Father are one.'¹ Or as the Upanishadic seers also proclaimed: '*Aham brahma-asmi*; I am Brahman.' The attempt to follow this principle is spiritual life.

What the world needs today is to explore the ethical and spiritual depths of the human being. Very few people are aware of their own spiritual dimension. By just exploring this dimension one can have a glimpse of one's true glorious nature, which results in the manifestation of a new personality that has the senses as slaves and not as masters. By exploring this spiritual dimension humans can discover the mysteries of the kingdom of God: 'Neither shall they say, Lo here, or lo there! For behold, the kingdom of God is within you.'² All the experiences of peace, serenity, and blessedness of the kingdom of God will be ours. But this plumbing into our depths needs constant attention and introspection. It is for this reason that all the great spiritual masters and aspirants sought to meditate in solitude and silence to finally understand the mysteries of existence and experience nirvana, samadhi, or the beatific vision.

In today's globalized world, when the human family is less fragmented by religion, race, or culture, we have the golden opportunity to


exchange notes, to learn from each other and to thus make solid progress towards a united world of spiritual culture. This ideal can be actualized if people start building their spiritual mind. We are all children of God, different waves in the ocean of Sat-chit-ananda, universal existence-consciousness-bliss; we are all different rays of the sun of consciousness. 

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1. John, 10.30.
2. Luke, 17.21.

(Continued from page 644)

Science is irresistibly coming to the conclusion that there is no separation between the observer and the observed, that matter cannot by itself observe itself. A mysterious veil is thrown by the ego, which creates the division. This universal Self has to be discovered uniquely in each experience and paradoxically within a state of personal-impersonal consciousness. In a silent state, beyond words or the chatter of the 'I', it is possible to have a glimpse of that eternal Being. It is the 'I' experiencing itself in all its activities, through its creations. But we continue to understand the world in a topsy-turvy manner: the world seen by the senses is taken to be real, while That which allows this to happen is considered to be unreal. And this attitude creates problems for the social system we live in, where technology, trade, and outdated scientism continue to dominate the world.

Consciousness, this nameless and formless energy, is known by its expressions, like light or electricity are never seen directly but through their effects, which are cognizable by our senses. The infinite is present in the finite; though clouded, consciousness reveals itself when one has purified this body-brain instrument. This entire universe is the play of consciousness. 

Swami Vivekananda's Concern for Common Humanity

Swami Tathagatananda

(Continued from the previous issue)

Back to India

SOMETIME AROUND APRIL OR MAY 1897 Swamiji stayed at Balaram Bose's house. There, during his discussion of the Vedas with Saratchandra Chakravarty, Girishchandra Ghosh asked Swamiji a question that was burning in his mind: 'A good deal of study you have made in the Vedas and Vedanta, but say, did you find anywhere in them any way for us out of all these profound miseries in the country, all these wailing of grief, all this starvation, all these crimes of adultery, and the many horrible sins?'²⁴ The effect of these words on Swamiji was tremendous. His eyes were filled with tears and he immediately left the room so that the others would not be disturbed by his powerful emotion. Girish turned to Saratchandra and said: 'Did you see, Bangal? What a great loving heart! I don't honour your Swamiji simply because he is a Pundit versed in the Vedas; but I honour him for that great heart of his which just made him retire weeping at the sorrows of his fellow-beings' (ibid).

Swamiji quickly rejoined the group and Swami Sadananda also arrived. Swamiji asked him: 'Can you do anything for our country?' (6.502). 'The slave is ready,' said Sadananda. Addressing Girishchandra Ghosh Swamiji said: 'Do you know Girish Babu, it occurs to me that even if a thousand births have to be taken in order to relieve the sorrows of the world, surely I will take them. If by my doing that, even a single soul may have a little bit of his grief relieved, why, I will

do it. Well, what avails it all to have only one's liberation? All men should be taken along with oneself on that way' (6.502-3).

Swamiji's thrilling words of infinite power had an immediate effect on his disciples. That very summer Akhandananda began relief work in various villages of Murshidabad district and founded an orphanage at Mahula, which was later moved to Sargachhi. Akhandananda, was the first of his brother-monks to start relief activities. On 15 June 1897 Swamiji wrote a very moving and inspiring letter to Akhandananda from Almora, congratulating him for his work in Murshidabad (6.400). In the same year eighty-four villages were saved from starvation by a famine relief centre started by Swami Trigunatitananda at Dinajpur. Deoghar also benefited from famine centres established there by Swami Virajananda. Later that summer, on 9 July, Swamiji wrote to Miss Mary Hale from Almora:

I feel my task is done—at most three or four years of life is left. I have lost all wish for my salvation. I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next; and may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and above all, my God the

wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship (5.136–7).

Swami Vivekananda brought the highest teachings of the Vedas to India's masses and to the world. Throughout India his call resounded: 'Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached.' In 1897 he delivered in Madras his powerful lecture 'The Future of India.' Regarding that great event Romain Rolland wrote years later: 'From that day, the awakening of the torpid Colossus began. If the generation that followed, saw, three years after Vivekananda's death, the revolt of Bengal, the prelude to the great movement of Tilak and Gandhi ... it is due to the initial shock, to the mighty "Lazarus, come forth!" of the message from Madras.'²⁵

He had great hope for the future generations of India. Her true servants and teachers would emerge from their poverty and rural isolation to build her anew. Sometime in 1900 Swamiji writes in his 'Memoirs of European Travel':

Let her [India] arise—out of the peasant's cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts, and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains. These common people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got a wonderful fortitude. They have suffered eternal misery, which has given them unflinching vitality. Living on a handful of grain, they can convulse the world; give them only half a piece of bread, and the whole world will not be big enough to contain their energy; they are endowed with ... inexhaustible vitality. ... And, besides, they have got the wonderful strength that comes of a pure and moral life, which is not

to be found anywhere else in the world. Such peacefulness and contentment, such love, such power of silent and incessant work, and such manifestation of lion's strength in times of action—where else will you find these!²⁶

By 1902, the year of Swamiji's *mahasamadhi*, the world began to witness the awakening of India in response to his call.

Great and far-reaching was the effect of Swamiji's feeling for the poor and afflicted. In April 1898 he was in Darjeeling. Returning there after visiting the snowy region of Sandukphu he suffered an attack of fever accompanied by coughing and a bad cold. He was well on the way to recovery when he received news of the plague in Calcutta. The shock put him in a grave mood and his health declined. Akhandananda remembered the incident:

Swamiji had been such a jolly person. Suddenly one morning I found that he had become serious. The whole day he did not eat anything, nor did he talk with anybody. The doctor was immediately called, but could not diagnose the disease. He [the Swami] sat the whole day with his head on a pillow. Then I heard that in Calcutta three-fourths of the population had left the metropolis owing to the plague epidemic. That's why Swamiji had become so serious. The Swami said at that time, 'We have to serve them, even though we are required to sell everything. We were only wandering monks living under a tree. We shall stay under a tree.'²⁷

In April and May 1898 the Ramakrishna Mission rallied their resources to alleviate the terrible effects of that year's plague in Calcutta. Despite being ill, on 3 May 1898 Swamiji returned to Calcutta with a full heart to head the massive relief work. The monks were daunted by the lack of funds, which had already been used to purchase land for building the new Math at Belur, the treasured future home of their

collective sadhana, work, and teaching. Swamiji instantly removed this obstacle from their minds with the words: 'We shall sell the newly-bought Math grounds, if necessary! We are sannyasins; we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily [Bhiksha] alms' (ibid.). Concerned about the safety of his frightened fellow citizens and to help prevent panic, Swamiji wrote an informative pamphlet in Bengali and Hindi and arranged for it to be printed and circulated by Sadananda, Sister Nivedita, and others. The pamphlet listed effective anti-plague measures and sanitary precautions, which were adaptable to everyone from the wealthiest to the poorest. The plague hit hardest in the bustees, the most unhygienic areas inhabited by the poor. To these Sister Nivedita gave her noble support. 'Workers came in numbers to cooperate with the Swami's disciples. He instructed them to teach sanitation and to themselves clean the lanes and houses of the areas to which they were sent. The relief that this service afforded the plague patients

was immense, and the measures adopted by the swami gave the people confidence' (2.329).

In 1899 Swamiji again came to help the people of Calcutta:

The Ramakrishna Mission plague service was promptly instituted on March 31 [1898] under Swamiji's instructions. It did considerable work in a well-organized way. He himself went to live in the slums to put heart in the people and encourage the workers. The management of the service was placed in the hands of the Sister Nivedita as Secretary and Swami Sadananda as the officer-in-chief. Swamis Shivananda, Nityananda, and Atmananda acted as assistants (2.438).

In December 1898 Swamiji was suffering from intense sleeplessness and asthma. He went to Baidyanath, Deogarh, for a brief rest at the house of Priyanath Mukherjee, a wealthy devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Niranjanananda was also present. One day they were out walking in the cold and came upon a man lying on the roadside

Swami Vivekananda in Calcutta, 1897



covered only with a rag, completely soiled and crying helplessly in pain from acute dysentery. Swamiji, the embodiment of Shiva, with the help of Niranjanananda, 'raised the suffering man to his feet. By supporting him the two monks brought him slowly to the house. There, they cleaned and clothed him, and applied hot fomentations. They nursed the sick man back to recovery. The host, instead of being vexed, was lost in admiration, and realized that the heart of Vivekananda was as great as his intellect' (2.408–9).

Swamiji's feeling for his fellow-men was so intense that it gave him a powerful intuitive sense of events. Two episodes during his life at Belur Math lend credibility to this suggestion. They were witnessed by Swami Vijnanananda, whose room was adjacent to Swamiji's. The first took place at two o'clock in the morning. Vijnanananda awoke to see Swamiji pacing back and forth along the eastern veranda. Feeling concerned he went to his room and asked Swamiji why he wasn't sleeping like the others. Swamiji said: 'Peshan, I was sleeping nicely; but suddenly I felt a jolt, and my sleep broke. It seems to me that there must be a disaster somewhere and many people are suffering.'²⁸ Vijnanananda discounted this as a strange idea and went back to bed. The next morning he was shocked to read in the newspaper of a tremendous volcanic eruption and high death toll in an area close to the Fiji Islands—at the precise time that Swamiji had awakened! Vijnanananda realized that Swamiji's sensitive nerves were 'more responsive to human misery than a seismograph' (ibid).

In the second episode Vijnanananda was brought out of his room after midnight by pitiable cries coming from Swamiji's room. Thinking he was ill, he stepped quietly into Swamiji's room and found him in tears. Unhappy at having disturbed him Swamiji explained: 'Brother, thinking of the poverty and suffering of the people, I cannot sleep. My mind is restless with pain. So I am

praying to the Master, "Let good befall our people and let their suffering go away"' (ibid.).

On 14 June 1901 Swamiji wrote to MacLeod from Belur Math that he was severely immobilized by illness: 'As for me, I was thrown *hors de combat* [disabled] in Assam. ... At Shillong—the hill sanatorium of Assam—I had fever, asthma, increase of albumen and my body swelled up to almost twice its normal size.'²⁹

In Varanasi four young men—Kedarnath, Charuchandra, Jaminiranjan, and Harinath—were inspired by the teachings of Swamiji. They wanted to implement his ideas through unselfish service and had already formed the core for this work. The leader of this group was inspired by Swami Vivekananda's famous poem 'To a Friend'. In 1901 they started the Poor Men's Relief Association, later known as the Ramakrishna Home of Service, Varanasi. 'They rented a small house and endeavoured with their limited means to provide proper food, shelter, and medical aid to destitute pilgrims, helpless widows, and aged persons lying ill on the streets and ghats of the city.'³⁰ Swamiji inspired these young men when he was at Varanasi and also wrote an appeal in favour of the Home of Service, dictating it in English.³¹

Swamiji felt particularly anxious about one youth who was so skeletal in appearance that he invited him to eat with him every single day. To prevent diabetic complications Swamiji followed his doctors' advice and ate at prescribed times as a rule to improve his health. But the boy worked hard and often came late. In spite of his own very poor health and protests from others, Swamiji always waited for the boy to arrive; only then would he eat.³²

Towards the end of 1901 Swami Advaitananda assigned Santals to fill and clear out the grounds surrounding the buildings at Belur Math. Swamiji grew very fond of the Santals and spent much time talking and laughing with



Swami Vivekananda in Calcutta, 1899

them. Because he earned their confidence, they spoke freely to him about their difficulties and sorrows, which often brought tears to his eyes. Their sound way of life and moral values were embodied in the personality of an elderly Santal named Keshta, whom Swamiji particularly loved.

Swamiji wanted to impart to his worthy brother monks the guiding principle that service to humanity is a path to realize God. He fully grasped the unique opportunity of involving the Santals to accomplish this goal. After consulting with Keshta to determine the dietary rules acceptable to the Santals, he invited the Santal workmen to a banquet he arranged and supervised. He watched them eating to their full and marvelling at their unexpected good fortune to taste the variety of good foods previously unknown to them. He felt their joy to be his own. When they were done Swamiji said to them: 'You are Narayanas, God manifest; today I have offered food to Narayana.'³³ After they left he said to Saratchandra Chakravarty: 'I found

them the veritable embodiment of God—such simplicity, such sincere guileless love I have seen nowhere else' (ibid.). But he did not stop there. Soon afterwards he spoke to the entire assembly of monks at Belur Math:

See how simple they are. Can you mitigate their misery a little? Otherwise, of what good is the wearing of the Gerua robe? Sacrifice of everything for the good of others is real Sannyasa (ibid.).

Alas! nobody thinks of the poor of this land. They are the backbone of the country, who by their labour are producing food—these poor people, the sweepers and labourers, who if they stop work for one day will create a panic in the town. But there is none to sympathize with them, none to console them in their misery. Just see, for want of sympathy from the Hindus, thousands of Pariahs in Madras are turning Christians. Don't think this is due simply to the pinch of hunger; it is because they do not get any sympathy from us. We are day and night calling out to them, 'Don't touch us! Don't touch us!'

... I sometimes feel the urge to break the barriers of 'Don't-touchism', go at once and call out, 'Come, all who are poor, miserable, wretched, and downtrodden', and bring them all together in the name of Shri Ramakrishna. ... Let us open their eyes. I see clear as daylight that there is the one Brahman in all, in them and me—one Shakti dwells in all. The only difference is of manifestation. Unless the blood circulates over the whole body, has any country risen at any time? If one limb is paralyzed, then even with the other limbs whole, not much can be done with that body—know this for certain (7.246).

After so much austerity I have understood this as the real truth—God is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. 'Who serves Jiva serves God indeed' (7.247).

With these words he turned to Saratchandra and said: 'What I have told you today, inscribe in your heart. See that you do not forget it (ibid.).

The great illumined soul that was Swamiji used to feel the pain of others in the same way as his Master. There is at least one incident in his life that is identical with Sri Ramakrishna's experience at Dakshineswar, when two boatmen were quarrelling at a distance and the Master experienced the blow of the one upon the other as a pain on his back. One day when Swamiji was at Darjeeling, he went for a morning walk with some people after taking his breakfast. He was enjoying the local scenery when his eyes fell upon an old bhutia-(from Bhutan) woman carrying a huge load on her back. Suddenly, she stumbled and fell to the ground with her burden, painfully bruising her ribs. Swamiji immediately felt a sympathetic vibration in the form of a stabbing pain.³⁴ We, common human beings, have no understanding. But we can understand and accept from Sri Ramakrishna's example that the pain felt by one individual can definitely be experienced as a sympathetic vibration of pain by another individual of universal affinity and sympathy.

Less than six months before the day of his *mahasamadhi*, Swamiji indicated that after a good deal of spiritual struggle and maturity he had come to the conclusion that serving the distressed as an emblem of God is the whole of religion. In a letter to Brahmananda dated 18 February 1902, from Varanasi, Swamiji writes: 'If in this hell of a world one can bring a little joy and peace even for a day into the heart of a single person, that much alone is true; this I have learnt after suffering all my life; all else is mere moonshine.'³⁵

Sri Ramakrishna said of Swami Vivekananda: 'The day when Naren comes in contact with suffering and misery the pride of his character will melt into a mood of infinite compassion. His strong faith in himself will be an instrument to re-establish in discouraged souls the confidence and faith they have lost. And the freedom of his conduct, based on mighty self-mastery, will shine brightly in the eyes of others, as a manifestation of the true liberty of the Ego.'³⁶

It can be understood from the foregoing incidents that the Master's prediction about Swamiji was literally vindicated.



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Education for Enablement

Pravrajika Brahmaprana

(Continued from the previous issue)

Concentration and Assimilation

THE THIRD LEVEL of education that Vivekananda stressed on was that which increases concentration and expands one's knowledge. 'To me the very essence of education,' Vivekananda stated, 'is concentration of mind. ... If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will.'¹⁵

The Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur, outside Kolkata, and the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, are modern examples of the ancient *gurukula* system, wherein students who live on campus are exposed to a spiritual environment of monastic life, daily meditation and recitation of the scriptures, seminars on values education, and a quiet atmosphere for study. In 2007 Valuvan, a math student at the Coimbatore Vidyalaya explained to me the value of his campus residency. 'Before coming to the Vidyalaya I could not focus on my studies,' Valuvan admitted, 'and my grades suffered. But now at the Vidyalaya the spiritual atmosphere makes it much easier for me to concentrate on my studies, and so my grades have improved.' What is the success rate of these students? Swami Atmaramananda, former secretary of the institution, reported that Vidyalaya students not only receive a higher calibre of education in Indian society, but after graduation they are able to procure a higher percentage of job hires as well.

A values-based education that helps students to focus and expand their knowledge also allows ethics to enter the school curriculum. Courses and seminars on values education and ethics teach students how to make constructive choices in life. One of the most important choices facing students is their career choice and how to make it a dharmic profession. How can education affect this? Former US president Abraham Lincoln, though a successful lawyer, had been exposed in his youth to the value of fairness. So inspired was Lincoln by this value that he incorporated it into his law practice as three guidelines for lawyers to live by: first, try whenever possible to arbitrate and settle cases out of court; second, accept only those clients whose innocence is assured; and third, never charge clients more than what is ethical.¹⁶

Ethics play yet another key role in education. The Bhagavadgita, which stresses the importance of doing one's own dharma—however poorly, rather than another's well¹⁷—should serve as a cautionary reminder to any teacher or parent who tries to control a student's education. Vivekananda warned against such authority figures who suffocate a child's natural desire for knowledge. Too often learning is killed by undue parental domination,¹⁸ especially when students are forced to pursue their parents' choice of profession rather than their own dharma.

Finally, we come to the third critical factor facing today's education: how can students—or *any one of us*, for that matter—assimilate

knowledge, especially with the growing challenge of media technology's effects on the brain? Teachers have always struggled to teach their students how to assimilate knowledge rather than fall prey to parroting the ideas of others. At the turn of the twentieth century Vivekananda warned his Vedanta students: 'By all this eternal swallowing it is a wonder that we are not all dyspeptics. Let us stop, and burn all the books, and get hold of ourselves and think. You all talk [about] and get distracted over losing your "individuality". You are losing it every moment of your lives by this eternal swallowing' (6.64).

Today the problem of 'eternal swallowing' is even greater, especially in those countries beset by information technology. In 2008 US citizens' information glut through the media—whether via television and movies, the Internet, iPods, or cellphones—was found to be three times greater per day than in 1960. Recent studies show that the average American computer users at work shift their attention about thirty-seven times per hour—whether by changing windows, checking e-mails, or opening new programs.¹⁹ 'This non-stop interactivity is one of the most significant shifts ever in the human environment,' Adam Gazzaley, neuroscientist at the University of California, warns. 'We are exposing our brains to an environment and asking them to do things we weren't necessarily evolved to do. We know already there are consequences' (ibid.).

How can our brain process this information glut? It cannot. According to yoga psychology, 'The powers of the mind are like rays of light dissipated; when they are concentrated, they illumine,' Vivekananda explains. 'This is our only means of knowledge. Everyone is using it, both in the external and the internal world; but, for the [Yoga] psychologist, the same minute observation has to be directed to the internal world.'²⁰

Research in the field of cyberpsychology and

the neurological dynamics of media learning shows that our ability to focus is now being compromised by bursts of information—whether through the earpiece of our cellphone or by what crosses our range of vision on the computer screen. Our daily onslaught of information bytes plays to the primitive human impulse to respond to immediate opportunities or threats—a stimulation that provokes excitement comparable to a 'dopamine squirt' and, what researchers say, can be addictive.²¹ Furthermore, all our juggling of e-mails, phone calls, and other incoming information has produced a generation of multitaskers, many of whom claim that multitasking makes them more productive. But research shows the opposite: heavy multitaskers have more trouble focusing and shutting out irrelevant information and therefore experience more stress, scientists confirm (ibid.). In fact, *even after their multitasking ends*, fractured thinking and lack of focus persists. Our brains are becoming rewired, researchers say, so that this is now our brain *off* computers and *away* from cellphones.

Media research says, however, that teachers and students can benefit from certain side effects of media learning. Imaging studies show that the brains of the Internet users can become more efficient at finding information, and that the players of some video games develop better visual acuity. But if teachers and parents want to develop students' power of thought via TV media, they need to guide their viewing—especially children—by teaching them critical viewing skills and how to distinguish TV fantasy from reality. This selective viewing causes a shift from an impulsive to a more reflective intellectual perspective and increases non-verbal IQ in students.²² More important still is that parents and teachers never allow electronic media to take the place of reading and writing, at home or in the classroom.

Some neuroscientists postulate that lack of downtime can also negatively affect nonverbal skills. Recent research shows that the brain's default activity consumes 'twenty times as much energy as the conscious life of the mind, including thinking, feeling, and using our senses.'²³ 'The brain at rest is not at rest,' explains neuroscientist Alvaro Pascual-Leone of Harvard. In fact, scientists are relatively certain that the default mode of the brain serves important functions such as preparing the brain for future contingencies by creating mental images that can help us make sense of real ones (ibid.).

In other words, these functions provide nonverbal strategies and skills that help us to not only manage our daily life, but also to improve the quality of our life. To do without downtime is to do without a mode of deeper creative thinking and reflection, which allows students the time and mental space necessary to process and assimilate new ideas and perspectives. 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life,' Vivekananda reminds us. 'We must have life-building, man-making, character-building, assimilation of ideas.' He punctuates this point by emphatically stating: 'If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library.'²⁴

Assimilation of ideas also takes place when there is a synergetic relationship between teacher and student. We find in the Upanishadic period that the guru's loftiest teachings were initiated only *after* the student was able to frame the right question. So also, teaching moments in the classroom occur when teachers can successfully provoke and stimulate their students to ask the right questions, the kind of questions that open doors to new discoveries. This occurs when teachers expose students to

new perspectives or investigative learning skills such as the Socratic method, interactive study groups, journal writing, or other teaching tools. The following true story illustrates how this synergy between teacher and student can spark an extraordinarily high level of education that enables one for a lifetime.

A Superior Teacher

Once upon a time, in the late 1800s, Helen was born to the Kellers on a large southern estate in Alabama. But at nineteen months of age Helen contracted scarlet fever, which turned into meningitis, a short-termed illness that left her deaf and blind. In the years that followed Helen was befriended by her sole playmate, Martha, the six-year-old black daughter of the Keller family's cook. The two girls became almost inseparable as Martha devised a homemade sign language just for Helen. But young Helen developed a fierce and feral wildness, born of a world bereft of sight and sound. It was an anger that knew no bounds. She fought with the servants' children, ate off the plates of her family members without rebuke, and displayed such violent tantrums that her parents considered admitting her to an asylum. As a last resort Helen's parents sought help from the Perkins Institute for the Blind. And that is how twenty-year-old Anne Sullivan, who was herself visually impaired, came to live on the Keller estate as Helen's nanny, governess, and eventual lifelong companion.

As soon as Anne arrived, she began to teach Helen in the sign language devised by Spanish monks. Immediately she presented Helen with a doll and then signed into Helen's hand d-o-l-l. Then came 'c-a-k-e,' 'water,' and 'tree,' as Anne guided Helen's hands to first touch these objects and then receive their corresponding sign in her hand. But Anne warned the parents that Helen's awakening, like other deaf blind students, would

come only after she had received at least a million signs. Then Helen would begin to internally assimilate the outer sign along with her mental 'sight' of the object. Thus, the long road to Helen's awakening was launched—a battle from start to finish. Helen kicked, bit, and hit Anne; she threw water into her face. In fact, the first day that Anne arrived Helen managed to lock her into her second-storey room and hid the key so that Anne could only be rescued from the rooftop by the Captain, Helen's father. But Anne was undaunted, and she quickly saw the real problem: Helen's parents, who hopelessly enabled their child's tantrums by indulging her. The morning after Anne's arrival, at breakfast, she was stunned when the Captain and his wife gave Helen a piece of cake in order to stop her tantrums.

'Why do you reward her for this behaviour?' she asked them.

'Have you no pity on our little Helen?' was their only defence.

But when Helen began to circle the breakfast table, grabbing food from each family member's plate and eating it, Anne refused to tolerate such behaviour. She demanded that both parents cease indulging Helen, but the parents refused. 'Leave this house!' they threatened, but Anne stood her ground and demanded that *they* leave the dining room so that she could work with Helen alone. Somehow Anne convinced both parents to step outside the house to avoid the three-hour tantrum that ensued. From the outside Helen's parents shuddered as they heard their daughter's screams amidst the crashes of china and silverware, overturned chairs, broken water pitchers, and the splatter of scrambled eggs splayed all over their posh antiques and dining room floor. Finally, when the dining room became quiet, Anne unlocked the door and ushered the parents back into their house. 'Helen,' Anne declared, 'has learned to eat with her spoon and *fold* her

napkin.' This was not only a victory for Anne, but a major turning point in Helen's life.

Anne was the kind of teacher that Ramakrishna would have called 'superior'. 'There are three classes of physicians,' he used to tell his disciples, 'superior, mediocre, inferior.'

The physician who feels the patient's pulse and just says to him, 'Take the medicine regularly' belongs to the inferior class. He doesn't care to inquire whether or not the patient has actually taken the medicine. The mediocre physician is he who in various ways persuades the patient to take the medicine and says to him sweetly: 'My good man, how will you be cured unless you use the medicine? Take this medicine. I have made it for you myself.' But he who, finding the patient stubbornly refusing to take the medicine, forces it down his throat, going so far as to put his knee on the patient's chest, is the best physician.²⁵

Ramakrishna, along with other great teachers, asserted that all knowledge is within, and Vivekananda used to reiterate his master's teaching by adding that even in a child this knowledge requires only an awakening from the teacher.²⁶ Indeed, Anne possessed this attitude toward her student to an extraordinary extent, and with great persistence she was able to teach the recalcitrant Helen obedience and manners so that even her parents were no longer embarrassed by their child.

But Anne was unstoppable. 'What Helen needs is more than obedience,' she told them. 'She needs to learn. She *can* learn; she is bright. It is *all there*. And that is why,' she added, 'I must take her to a separate cottage on the property—away from your influence.' Vivekananda would have agreed with Anne. Helen required a *gurukula* environment, a haven away from the distractions of the world and authority figures that unwittingly diverted or suffocated her

natural desire to learn by their indulgences or undue parental domination. It was critical that Helen be in an environment where she could completely focus on the knowledge that Anne was ready to awaken within her. Finally, the parents consented, and Anne brought Helen to an isolated cottage on the family estate for two weeks of intensive training.

Through her gentle sense of touch, Anne first began to build Helen's faltering trust in her. Gradually, with patience and persistence, Anne instilled in Helen enough faith so that she could finally accept her instruction without tantrums or power plays. Then, the real education began. Anne taught Helen words connected with behaviours and objects, how to dress and eat and the wonders of nature—flowers, trees, birds hatching, and streams flowing. The stream water was a particular delight for young Helen, as she unabashedly sat in the river bed overjoyed to feel the cool water flow around and over her.

Too quickly the two weeks passed, and Anne reluctantly returned with Helen to the parents' mansion. Now would come the test. And sure enough, on that same day, as soon as the family had assembled for their family reunion dinner, Helen threw her napkin on the floor. Immediately Anne picked it up and forcibly returned it to its rightful place on the table. Again Helen threw the napkin and again Anne returned it; then again the napkin, the spoon, followed by Helen's water glass. But Anne was just as determined as Helen, if not more so. Captain and Mrs



Helen Keller at age 8 with her tutor Anne Sullivan on vacation in Brewster, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, July 1888

Keller, however, could not bear the confrontation. 'We haven't seen our dear little girl in two weeks. Why must you be so strict with Helen—especially at our family dinner?'

'Why?' Anne retorted, 'Because you are undoing everything I have done!'

'That's not true!' the Captain protested. 'You're too hard on Helen. And if you don't stop, you will have to leave this house!'


Suddenly the stepson intervened, 'No, father, Anne is right. Let her teach Helen. She has already taught her so much.' As soon as the stepson spoke, Helen picked up a water pitcher and threw it at Anne. But in a flash, Anne swept

Helen off her feet and stormed outdoors with Helen riding on her hip. Straight to the water pump she went, so that Helen would be forced to refill the pitcher she had thrown. With one hand on Helen's, she started to pump; and with her other, she drew Helen's free hand under the flow of water. 'W-a-t-e-r,' she signed into Helen's palm. Suddenly Helen's whole face changed. She broke free of Anne and joyously felt the water run through her fingers as the long-awaited moment of recognition struck her full force. Helen then spoke the magic word 'W-a-t-e-r!' She then ran to a nearby tree, hugged it, and signed 'T-r-e-e' into Anne's palm, and then rushed to her parents on the porch and signed first 'mother' and then 'father', as she embraced each of them. Anne was exhausted as the young Helen ran from object to object and person to person until finally Helen returned to Anne, stood before her, and signed into her hand, 'Who are you?' 'T-e-a-c-h-e-r,' Anne signed back, tears streaming from her eyes.

In 1904, at the age of twenty-four, Helen Keller graduated from Radcliffe College, the first deaf blind person in America to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. Helen then went on to become a world-famous speaker and author, a renowned advocate for people with disabilities, a suffragist, pacifist, a women's healthcare advocate, and, among other organizations, she helped to found the American Civil Liberties Union. Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan travelled to over thirty-nine countries and met every US president from Grover Cleveland to Lyndon B Johnson. On 14 September 1964 President Johnson awarded Helen Keller the Presidential Medal of Freedom, one of the United States' highest two civilian honours.²⁷

Helen Keller's life best exemplifies Vivekananda's character-building education: 'Each one can grow and strengthen his personality. This is one of the great practical things, and this is the

secret of all education. This has a universal application. In the life of a householder, in the life of the poor, the rich, the man of business, the spiritual man, in every one's life, it is a great thing, the strengthening of this personality.'²⁸

Strength of character is central to Vivekananda's ideal. By *strength* he meant not only physical strength and well-being, but depth of thought, strength of conviction, and faith in oneself, a spirit of service, and practical efficiency. It is this type of strength that enables all of us—parents, teachers, or students—to develop faith in ourselves and overcome all difficulties. With infinite capacity within each one of us, this strength can surely make us prosperous in any walk of life. 

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REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications



Management Mantras

S Ramaratnam

D K Printworld, 'Srikunj', F-52, Bali Nagar, Ramesh Nagar Metro Station, New Delhi 110 015. Website: www.dkprintworld.com. 2010. xviii + 261 pp. ₹ 280.

In an inspiring foreword to *Indian Ethos for Management*, published by Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, Swami Ranganathananda emphasizes the role of philosophy in guiding human life. The swami says: 'Such a philosophy has been given to humanity by experiment and experience by the sages ... few thousand years ago in India.' Further, Swami Vivekananda advocated a combination of Western efficiency and dynamism with the holistic approach of service to the Divine as a necessity for perfection.

Management Mantras, cautions the author, is not a textbook on management. It is about the wisdom revealed in Sanskrit literature that directly corresponds to many issues in contemporary corporate management. The author quotes extensively from Vedic and classical texts, and in twelve chapters he deals with managerial functions such as decision making, communication, HRD, organizational behaviour, and social responsibility. Each chapter has within it a section on wisdom, where the author quotes the appropriate ancient thinker.

Fostering team spirit is among the most challenging assignments for leaders. Ramaratnam has discussed this topic by saying that a team leader's work is to galvanize the team and make the assignments exciting. He also discusses the various factors that determine an individual's personality as well as karmic influences. Each individual is unique and carries a karma that influences his or her conduct, capacity, intelligence, and success. The author says, like elders at home, that

executives also should be ethical in their activities and standards, otherwise the whole enterprise is torn to pieces in a short time due to non-adherence to ethics. In the Ramayana Sri Rama seeks the views of other leaders before making up his mind to accept Vibhishana. In the same way, corporate CEOs should seek the opinion of functional heads rather than take arbitrary decisions on important issues. In most cases collective wisdom is desirable. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is a treasure house of principles in administering a state, some of which are useful to managers of enterprises. In this monumental work, Kautilya has cautioned rulers about the dangers of ignoring impoverishment and dissatisfaction in the people. In industry the failure of management to take timely action in redressing genuine employee grievances has resulted in loss and damage.

Anger is justified, but it should be controlled. In this context we have a lesson from Sri Ramakrishna, who utilized an identical situation to correct the attitude of two of his disciples, one aggressive and the other too mild. Power is invariably associated with leadership, but this power has to be utilized for the benefit of all the team members. The author here quotes the *Raghuvamsha* to show how King Dilipa, though respected, is easily accessible even to the common person (118). Extensive quotations delineating the qualities of a leader are cited from various sources and provide a good lesson for managers.

Today there is a growing conflict between industry on one side, environment and ecology on another side, and society on a third side. This book tries to show how corporate attitudes need to change and become more responsible to end all conflicts. *Management Mantras* is therefore a useful tool to understand management and literature on management.

P S Sundaram
Chennai



Awakening India

Swami Vivekananda

Ramakrishna Mission, Ramakrishna Ashrama Marg, New Delhi 110 055.
E-mail: ashram@rkmissiondel.org.
2011. viii + 120 pp. ₹ 55.

A collection of Swami Vivekananda's stirring words to awaken India, this book has been published in commemoration of the worldwide 150th birth anniversary of Swamiji. It has a comprehensive approach towards the duty of nation-building and touches all the important sections of India's citizens: youth, reformers, women, masses, and educationists. A holistic reform and reconstruction of Indian society can be achieved only when all the sections, as categorized in the chapters of this book, work together. Swamiji did not give palliative solutions, he went to the root of the problems and gave wonderful remedies for the various obstacles India is facing in its self-sustained growth.

Swamiji's message for the youth is highly motivating. These fiery words can channelize our youth towards transforming the nation and establishing its identity in the world. The youth, in tune with their values and traditions, will take pride in their own culture and arrest the negative aspects of globalization. Swamiji had repeatedly emphasized the importance of developing *shraddha*, faith, in oneself, in building one's character and standing on one's own feet in order to remove laziness, meanness, and hypocrisy, which have covered the whole country. Sincerity and purity of purpose will bring a fresh vigour in the national veins.

Entrepreneurship has to also solve the problems of hunger, slavery, and ignorance; only then true spirituality can be preached and realized by them. Swamiji's message for the reformers points out that the fruits of reform must percolate to the masses and not to a few segments of society; otherwise all reforms will only be ornamental, as it has been in the past.

True education releases the power coiled within everyone. Swamiji wanted an education that will assimilate national ideals, enable Indians to be proud of their nation, and find solutions to life's challenges without simply cramming and obtaining a degree for employment. Swamiji's

direction in this area has to be taken up sincerely and quickly. Education should focus on man-making. Teachers should possess the qualities of purity and selflessness and should be capable of coming down to the level of the students. The present attempts towards achieving a student-centric and student-friendly education can be gleaned from his message. Swamiji also lays down the necessary conditions a student should cultivate and the proper way learning is to be transmitted. This is very relevant today as the present educational system is a far cry from what Swamiji wanted.

Women empowerment is also an urgent need in India. Swamiji shows the drawbacks in the current procedures for empowering women. A woman is the embodiment of Shakti, and the ideal of India for a woman is motherhood. A wonderful comparison between Indian and Western women is provided by Swamiji. It brings out the fact that empowering women is essential for a nation to develop, and this empowerment is possible by an all-round education, by giving women the same status as men, and by enabling them to solve their own problems. Once the Indian woman achieves self-reliance, she will uphold the ideals of womanhood as personified in Sita, Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, and others.

Swamiji also suggests ways of restoring India's glory by regenerating the masses. It will bring strength and will be a firm foundation for the nation. The greatest sin, he said, 'was the neglect of the masses'. When the masses will be properly looked after all the current petty divisiveness will be eradicated. His message further suggests establishing a symbiotic relationship with the West, from where India can learn scientific knowledge without disturbing its inherent religious knowledge. This combination will bring in great good to the masses.

Swamiji's sayings have been meticulously organized and categorized in appropriate chapters. *Awakening India* is particularly relevant today, in spite of India's robust economic growth and a sense of unmatched freedom. India needs to heed Swamiji's words and develop on the lines laid by him.

Anuradha Bhattacharyya
School Teacher, Kolkata

REPORTS

Commemoration of the 175th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna

The following centres celebrated the 175th birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna through several programmes. **Chengalpattu**: procession, devotional songs, talks, and cultural programmes at Valipuram village on 7 August 2011, in which 500 people participated; **Cooch Behar**: devotees' convention on 7 August, in which 430 devotees took part; **Limbdi**: talks on the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna in five schools in the month of August; **Salem**: a six-day programme consisting of discourses, procession, and interfaith meet in July.

Commemoration of the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

The following centres celebrated the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda through several programmes. **Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata**: cultural competitions, in which 1,066 school and college students participated; **Bangalore**: students' conventions on 21 and 28 August, in which altogether 1,050 students participated; **Belgaum**: a youth convention on 30 July, in which about 1,000 students from various colleges took part, and a devotees' convention on 31 July, in which about 600 devotees participated; **Chandigarh**: talks on the life and message of Swamiji at three schools in Patiala and one school in Chandigarh; **Chengalpattu**: blood donation camp at a local college on 5 August; **Delhi**: sarod recital and Bharatanatyam dance recital at India Habitat Centre, Delhi, on 29 July; **Kadapa**: personality development workshop on 20 August, in which about 550 youths participated; **Kanchipuram**:



exhibition from 3 to 7 August and public meeting on 7 August; **Limbdi**: talks on the life and message of Swamiji in five schools in August; **Mangalore**: seminars for postgraduate students and headmasters on 26 and 27 August respectively; **Medinipur**: interschool cultural competitions on 13 August and seminars at four high schools in July and August; **Nattarampalli**: talks at a local engineering college on 27 July; **Pune**: value education workshops for police constables and officials at six police stations, and one workshop for prisoners at Yerawada Jail, Pune; **Salem**: distribution of 48,494 specially printed notebooks to 10,386 needy students at 75 rural schools; **Shillong**: cultural competitions, in which 2,078 students from 44 schools participated; **Taki**: a cultural competition, yogasanas, and physical fitness display on 14 August; **Visakhapatnam**: interschool cultural competitions on 31 July and 1 August, and a seminar for college students on 14 August.

On the initiative of **Persatuan Sri Ramakrishna Sarada, Malaysia**, the postal stamp on Swamiji brought out by Pos Malaysia—a post services company in Malaysia—was released by Swami Prabhananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, in a function organized at Penang, Malaysia, on 2 August.

News from Branch Centres

A newly constructed guesthouse at **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, was inaugurated on 11 July.

Swami Prabhananda consecrated the foundation stone for the proposed Universal Meditation Centre at Swami Vivekananda College premises in Nadi, Fiji, on 21 July.

Relief

Flood Relief • In the wake of the widespread floods caused by incessant rains and releasing of water by Damodar Valley Corporation, nine centres in West Bengal conducted primary relief work among flood-affected families in nearby areas. Details of the relief operations are as follows. **Antpur** centre distributed 36,018 kg chira, 3,500 kg sugar, 10,200 packets of biscuits, and 1 lakh halogen tablets among 21,840 flood-affected families of Jangipara block in Hooghly district and Amta-II and Udaynarayanpur blocks in Howrah district. **Belgharia** centre distributed 29,960 kg chira, 3,200 kg sugar, and 340,000 halogen tablets among 3,210 flood-affected families of 20 villages at Daspur-I and Daspur-II blocks in Paschim Medinipur district. **Ichapur** centre distributed 40,000 kg chira and 3,500 kg sugar among 25,648 flood-affected families of 46 villages in Khanakul-II block of Hooghly district. **Malda** centre distributed 7,384 kg chira, 3,345 kg sugar, 669 kg dal, and 225 kg milk powder among 669 flood-affected families of 14 villages at Ratua and Harishchandrapur blocks in Malda district. **Medinipur** centre distributed 14,000 kg chira, 3,000 kg sugar, and 2,500 packets of biscuits among 2,794 flood-affected families of Maligram, Gobardhanpur, Bagnabar, and Jalchak circles under Pingla block in Paschim Medinipur district. **Naora** centre distributed 10,000 kg chira and 1,000 kg sugar among 2,920 flood-affected families of 23 villages in North and South 24-Parganas districts; the centre also served cooked food for 5 days to 80 affected families of Tabla-Kushangra village in South 24-Parganas district. **Saradapitha** centre distributed 1,000 kg rice, 25,000 kg chira, 2,500 kg sugar, 29 cartons of biscuits, and 2 lakh halogen tablets among 5,678 flood-affected families of Udaynarayanpur and Amta-II blocks in Howrah district. **Sargachhi** centre conducted the following relief operations in 4 blocks of Murshidabad district: (i) distributed 650 kg chira, 350

kg sugar, 839 packets of biscuits, 5 bags of bleaching powder, and 190,000 halogen tablets among 2,314 flood victims; (ii) served cooked food (khi-churi) to 9,267 affected persons of 14 villages; and (iii) distributed 1,474 saris, 1,366 lungis, and 225 dhotis to needy people in 10 villages. **Sikra-Kulingram** centre distributed 4,250 kg chira, 1,437 kg sugar, 6,000 packets of biscuits, and two lakh halogen tablets among 1,161 flood-affected families of 16 villages under Swarup Nagar and Baduria blocks in North 24-Parganas district.

Distress Relief • The following centres distributed various items to needy people. **Baghbazar**: 2,000 saris, 106 shirts, and 118 frocks; **Belgharia**: 200 kg chira, 250 kg rice, 50 kg dal, 10 kg salt, and 21 poly water tanks of 1,000 l capacity; **Limbdi**: 1,875 kg of dry dole to 150 poor people of Limbdi town; **Porbandar**: 3,754 notebooks and 172 sets of textbooks among 686 needy students; **Purulia**: 2,000 kg chira, 300 kg gur, and 600 kg sugar to 400 needy people of Purulia-II and Pancha blocks in Purulia district. **Baghbazar** centre also served meals to 21 poor persons of a nearby slum daily in the month of July. In August **Lucknow** centre provided Vitamin A capsules to 3,008 underprivileged school children and free glasses to 193 of them who had refractory errors; besides, three of these children were given IOL implants. ☪

Appeal

In the wake of floods in West Bengal caused by recent incessant rains and release of water by Damodar Valley Corporation, the Ramakrishna Mission has started primary relief work through six of its branch centres among flood-affected families in their nearby areas. All donations to 'RAMAKRISHNA MISSION' are exempt from Income Tax under section 80-G of the I.T. Act. Donations may please be sent either by cash or cheque or demand draft drawn in favour of 'RAMAKRISHNA MISSION', to:

THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Ramakrishna Mission

P.O. Belur Math, Dist. Howrah, W.B. 711 202

Website: www.belurmath.org/relief

(Online donations are accepted)